













MEDIEVAL INDIAN LITERATURE

An Anthology

VOLUME THREE

# Selections



SAHITYA AKADEMI

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# Guide to Users

## PRONUNCIATION AND TRANSLITERATION

The following system of transliteration approved by Sahitya Akademi for *Modern Indian Literature* is adopted for *Medieval Indian Literature* too.

### SYSTEM OF TRANSLITERATION

#### *Vowels*

a	i	u	e	o	ai
ā	ī	ū	ē	ō	au

#### *Consonants*

	Velar	Palatal	Retroflex	Alveolar	Dental	Labial
<b>Stops</b>						
1. vl.	k	c	ṭ	t'	t	p
2. vl. asp.	kh	ch	ṭh		th	ph
3. vd.	g	j	ḍ		d	b
4. vd. asp.	gh	jh	ḍh		dh	bh
<b>Nasals</b>	ṅ	ñ	ṇ	n'	n'	m
<b>Trill</b>					r	
<b>Flap</b>					r	
<b>Laterals</b>			l	l		
<b>Fricatives</b>	h	ś'	ṣ	s		
<b>Continuants</b>	y	ṷ				

v  
Labio-dental

### PHONETIC SYMBOLS VS. CONVENTIONAL SPELLING

1. It may be noted that wherever the pronunciation of medieval proper nouns (names of major authors and titles of important works) is indicated in parentheses, the symbols in the above chart are used with diacritics. However, in running matter as a rule, conventional spellings familiar to the average reader are retained to provide for easy reading.

## GUIDE TO USERS

2. Conventional spellings corresponding to some of these phonetic symbols are given below:

Phonetic Symbols		Conventional Spelling
ī	:	i/ee
ū	:	u/oo
s'	:	s/sh
ṣ	:	sh
t'	:	t
ṭ	:	t
t	:	t/th
v	:	b/v/w

3. Variant spellings are sometimes found even within conventional system.
4. The pronunciation of the same word may at times be represented by different conventional spellings in Roman script when it occurs in the contexts of different Indian languages. These may indicate variations in pronunciation.
5. The pronunciation of a word of Sanskrit origin may always be the same in a modern Indian language as in the original Sanskrit.
6. In loan-words from Persian or Arabic or Portuguese, slight modifications in the system of transliteration may be necessary to indicate the exact pronunciation.



# Selections





# Medieval Maithili Literature

## Selections

### JYOTIRISHVAR

JYOTIRISHVAR (Jyotirīśvar; full name, Jyotirīśvara Thākura, c. 1260-1340) was a versatile litterateur in the court of an illustrious Karnata king of Mithila. He was equally proficient in Sanskrit, Apabhramsha and Maithili. He is known for his Sanskrit works *Panchasayak* (on erotics) and *Dhurtasamagama* (Dhūrtasamāgama, a farce in two acts). His father was Dhireshwara and grandfather Rameshwara. He was called Kavishekharacharya (chief of the poets' poets) by his contemporaries as a mark of respect. His fame today, however, rests on the Maithili works *Varnnaratnakar* (An Ocean of Rubrics), a prose work, and the Maithili version of *Dhurtasamagama*, a dramatic work which contains lyrics prior to Vidyapati. He is the earliest Maithili writer of eminence and his works have established the antiquity of Maithili literature at least 100 years before Vidyapati.

#### 1

### Ocean of Rubrics

*Varnnaratnakar* (Varnnaratnākara, c. 1324) is a veritable compendium of conventional descriptions of all sorts of subjects, perhaps for use by bards and actors on different occasions. These passages are arranged into eight chapters aptly called *kallols* (waves). The first deals with city life. The second describes the hero and the heroine. The third is devoted to the royal court and the descriptions of night, morning, etc. The fourth gives a detailed account of the six seasons, the fine arts, etc. The fifth describes the royal army, the forest and the hill-folk. The sixth is devoted to the descriptions of the courtiers and the artists. The seventh deals with the cremation ground, the deserts, the rivers and the gods. The last one deals with miscellaneous matters.

The extracts given below are taken from the second and the fourth chapters.

#### 1

### Description of a Heroine

Her feet are perfect with five excellences: they are luminous, soft, red, have uniform soles of even surface and are decked with ornaments. Both

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her knees (thighs) are tender, delicate, very much like the trunks of an elephant. Her hips are plump, fleshy and formed like the back of a tortoise. Her navel is deep, going round to the right. Her waist is remarkable in three ways: it is slender, soft and gracefully rounded—it is capable of being held in one's fists. The winding line of hair above her navel is darkish, smooth, soft, thin, graceful and long. Her breasts are handsome, close to each other, plump, firm, elevated, and round. Her arms are long, round, resembling in form the stem of a lotus; her hands are soft, rosy, clean and beautiful, resembling the red leaves of *ashoka*. Her neck is soft like cotton wool, and bears three lines. Her ears are soft, curved, bearing ear-rings and other gold ornaments. Her teeth are even, glossy, well-formed, well-set, uniform, bright, and well-dyed.

Wearing such ornaments as *khuti*, chain, solid necklace, one-row necklace, bangles, bracelets, girdle, wire anklets, ear-rings, armlets, and others, see how she looks: as if she were meant to be the banner of the love-god's conquest over the world. It appears that Indra became thousand-eyed and Brahma four-faced in order to embrace her.

### //

#### Description of the Morning

In the abodes of god, five kinds of sounds are heralding the day. The trumpets are announcing the second, minute and hour of the morning. Huge elephants are trumpeting. Crows are noisily cawing. The stars have disappeared and the moon has lost its lustre. The east is aglow with a rosy tint. The bees have set out to (gather honey from) flowers. The reciters of Vedas have begun chanting the vedic verses. The ladies of respectable families have resumed their life of modesty. The boatmen have taken up their duties on the river banks. The morning musicians (in the castles) have started wishing victory to their prince. The officers of the state are attending to their offices. The wayfarers have sought their way (to their destinations). The chieftains have begun to offer their prayers to the gods. Everywhere good life has begun.

### ///

#### Description of the Noon

(Specially in Summer)

All the ten directions are obliterated by the sight of mirages everywhere. The sun has become like a highly vexed official. The earth has become

excessively hot like the fire in a heap of chaff or like a fire-place in the open air. The heat-oppressed earth has become like the misery-stricken heart of a pauper. The ponds look like battlefields deserted by the defeated enemy. Wayfarers have abandoned their movement on the roads. Beasts have sought shelter in shady places. Young women have taken to water sports. Brahmins have commenced their mid-day rites and observances. Days have lengthened. The sunshine is scorchingly hot. The *chatak* bird's insatiable thirst is pervasive. There is dearth of water in reservoirs. The forest conflagrations are ferocious. The hills are being denuded. The thirst is unquenchable. The heat is inordinate. Breeze is deeply desired, and coolness is impatiently yearned for. See such a mid-day of the summer season!

#### IV

#### Description of the Evening

Having finished the business of the world, the sun has withdrawn himself to the Setting Mount (in the west) and disappeared. The bees have left the lotus flowers. When darkness covered the sky, night, which was so long in hiding for fear of the sun, staged a come-back to merge into it. How did it further look like? See the heaviness of smoke, the movement of the cows to their folds, the noisy chirping of birds, the shining of the stars, the appearance of the lights in the lamps, (the breathing exercises of) the Shrotriya Brahmins, the sexual shyness of the newly-weds, sexual delight of the mature women, the shrinking of lotus flowers, the inactivity of the bees, the reposing of travellers, the floating in the air of glow-worms, the flight of owls around, the howling of jackals. The eagerness of young women to meet their lovers, the ardour of young men, the going about of the epicureans for providing themselves a second time with objects of pleasure, the culmination of the music of the evening orchestra and such other activities.

#### V

#### Description of a Night in the Rains

See the night as if it were made up of walls of collyrium besmeared with oil, the clouds as bales of soot which have been loosened by gusts of westerly wind; see darkness thick and massive, the clouds spread over the sky; the flash of lightning makes one aware of the roads and the various directions. The eyes fail to function. In such a night the sound of leaves makes one locate the trees, the croaking of frogs helps one locate reservoirs, the chirping of birds makes one locate the forest, the cry of a cricket helps one locate the

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earth, the rumbling of clouds makes one aware of the sky, the human voice helps locate a house, the gleam of firelights give out the whereabouts of the city, the sound of footsteps helps one locate the paths, human speech helps one distinguish one person from another. On such a night even a talented person's sense of direction may be deluded.

### VI

#### Description of Darkness

Impenetrable like the nether world, inscrutable like the character of a woman, massive like the surge of river Kalindi, dense as a mountain of collyrium, like the brother of sin, like the personification of the City of Terror, futile like an imperfect chant, delusive like ignorance, capable of carrying one all round like one's mind, high like self-conceit, despicable like malice, murky like sin, see it all pervasive, rendering all movement difficult, eye-blinding, terrible, dense, impenetrable. See such darkness.

See the Night, the personification of a combination of such variegated objects as: the cloud, the buffalo, the bee, the *tamala* (tobacco) tree, the raven, the cuckoo, the boar, the collyrium, the hair, the black antelope, the river Kalindi, the (goddess) *Kalika*, etc.

See darkness as facilitating the movements of heroines who are intent on having a tryst (helping) the thieves in their vile activities, as is fit for the howling of jackals, inspiring to the demons to indulge in their sports and the imps to carry on their nefarious activities, as demoralizing the cowardly, as helping the virtuous in the environment of devotional sentiments, as making eyes useless and abetting the impact of the wicked. See the darkness having such distinguishing features as the wiping out of light, the obliterating the sense of directions, permeating the void everywhere. It can verily be seen as making palpably concrete the tenth element expounded by Bhatta: see such impregnable darkness!

### VII

#### Description of the Moon

See the moon like a bracelet of conch shells in the sky for Lady Night, like the (oval) *Kamandalu*, or water-jar, of a holy anchorite who has been (recently) initiated, like the brilliance of moonstone, like the leader of the entourage of stars, like the (surging) wave of the ocean of erotic sentiments, like the life of an assemblage of white sandal marks on the forehead of the Western Mount of the setting sun's mount in the West, like the Zone that has been

liberated from the realm of darkness, like the glory of the love god's sacrifice (*yajna*), soothing like an eye-ointment for people's eyes, see such a moon rising in the sky !

Again what kind (of moon)? (See her) as the thrill of joy in all the directions as the blossoming of an assemblage of white lilies, as the easing of a fastidious beloved's ground of annoyance, as banishing darkness, as agonizing a separated beloved, as illumining a night, as disappointing a beloved in carrying out a tryst, see such a moon rising in the sky !

Again, how else does the moon look like ? She comes out with all her sixteen aspects. They are known as Haravallabh (dear to Shiva), Manohara (charming), Prabhavati (the bright-light shedder), Mohini ( the coquette), Mohita (the infatuated), Lalita (the lovely), Unnata (the proud one), Bhadra (the lucky one), Bhadratara (the more lucky), Harini (the deer-like), Tarangini (the floating one), Nanda (the happy one), Sunanda (the happy beauty), Pratima (the photographic one), Gajadanta (having white teeth like the elephant's tusks); see such sixteen-phased full moon rising in the sky.

### VIII

#### Description of a Procuress

Aged less than three hundred years, having grey eyebrows, hair whiter than a conch, skin wrinkled, veins visible, body reduced to skeleton, cheeks sunken, mouth toothless, span of life for herself having been forcibly snatched (but) deprived of vigour, lips murmuring as soon as (she) attempts to speak, hands tightly holding each other as soon as they are brought together, like the elder sister of Markandey, like the daughter of Avarice, like the aunt of wisdom, crafty, like the natural sister of the negotiator Narada, a prime go-between like Vishnu's Maya, violator of the chastity of even the pure women: see how the procuress can turn even the ladies of respectable families into women of easy virtue.

She keeps quarrelling with death. Death says: "I shall take you away." She says: "Allow me to spend one year more. I should like to see the glory and prosperity of the city and then depart."

Further, how is she? As the love god's tongue which has been torn, as passion which has abandoned her youth.

Though her body has become like a dried-up lake, yet she seeks to bathe and deck herself with cosmetics. See such a life-sucking procuress !

### An Assemblage of Knaves

*Maithili Dhurttā Samagama* (c. 1324) is the Maithili version of a two-act farce, originally written in Sanskrit. It aims at highlighting the degeneration in contemporary society. The main persons chosen for revealing their fraudulent character and corruption are a monk, a pandit, a student, a barber, a courtesan and a pretentious pious lady.

The importance of the present work is, however, not so much for its subject matter as for its being the first vernacularization of Sanskrit playwriting. Maithili songs were inserted and the full length Sanskrit play was abridged considerably. These Maithili songs were written in the manner of Jayadeva, which Vidyapati was later able to raise to great heights in various directions. But they are valuable more as dramatic songs than as lyrics. As such they contribute to the development of the *Kirtaniya* drama of Mithila, with "entrance" songs, "speech" songs, "dance" songs, descriptive songs, translation songs. Here, however, fun, laughter, mockery, and satire dominate the mood which is evident even in the names of the characters.

The Shrotriya Pandit is called "Low Class" Mishra, the teacher monk is Mr. "World City", the Lady is "Sex Fond", the Barber is "Root Destroyer" and so on.

The extract below is taken from the First Act in which Lady "Sex Fond" and Saintly Monk "World City" are exposed as frauds.

Vishvanagar	:	A preceptor monk
Snatak	:	His disciple
Suratapriya	:	A fraudulent lady

### Act One

VISHVANAGAR: It is rumoured that the ascetic lady, who has undertaken a month-long fast, is a sharper. Let us go to her

*(The two stand in a lonely corner.)*

*(Enter Suratapriya)*

*(In Sarangi melody. Rhythmic beats with palms)*

O! (here) comes the lady who (is) on a month-long fast,

A parasite on the wealth of the residents (is she) (Refrain)

(She carries *kusha* (grass), *kamandalu* (water-jar), *puda* (leaff-pot), and a conch)

*Rudraksha* beads (she has as) bracelets on the arms and in the neck

(She has) applied white sandal mark on her broad forehead.

Sitting by the wayside, she dupes the pedestrians.

Living on pure vegetarian diet she professes the path of virtue and salvation,

And robs the fool and the wise alike.  
On listening to the *modus operandi* of Suratapriya  
Minister Shri Ganeshvar laughs.

SURATAPRIYA: Religion is not for me, as it exacts a lot of troublesome duties,  
(However) it is true, salvation can enable me to lead a life of comforts,  
(But) wealth is capable of giving me the enjoyment of the treasure of all  
the sports of love.

SNATAKA: (*approaching her*) O lady ! here Honourable Vishvanagar has  
arrived as (your) guest.

SURATAPRIYA: (*walking around and looking up*) Where is the Honourable  
Sir ? I shall welcome him. (*approaching him*) Pray, Sir, accept my  
obeisance.

VISHVANAGAR: (*gleefully*) May your desires attain fulfilment !

SURATAPRIYA. Honourable Sir, that can only be achieved if you show you  
pleasure (by accepting my offer).

VISHVANAGAR: Well, let it be (made to me) as early as possible.

SURATAPRIYA: Honourable Sir, you may command what I should do for you  
and what I may offer you.

VISHVANAGAR: O good lady, there is nothing to offer me that cannot be  
presented by you. At present, let it be some alms only.

SURATAPRIYA: Will you, honourable Sir, kindly specify what kind of alms and  
at what hour and what items ?

VISHVANAGAR: Listen, O lovely lady ! Meat, *urid*<sup>1</sup> pulse, pator vegetable,  
*takra*<sup>2</sup>, globules and cakes of bean powder fried in oil, green vegetables  
of *bathua*<sup>3</sup> leaf, long gourd, fish, *moong*<sup>4</sup> pulse preparation, tasty thick  
milk and clarified butter, fresh curd, banana— briefly let these, in short,  
comprise my alms.

(*Song in Barali Melody, Ekatali Tal*)

Oh, you will please arrange alms for me !  
O lovely lady ! you will please arrange alms for me (*Refrain*)  
Meat, fish, cakes and globules of powdered bean should be dressed up !  
Fresh-picked leaves and *paroda* vegetable  
And *moong* pulse cooked in a special way  
Which all friends will ask for a little more of,  
Fresh curd curdled the same day,

1. A kind of Indian bean.
2. A kind of curry.
3. A green vegetable.
4. Another kind of pulse.



Oh listen ! fresh well-boiled milk and good clarified butter,  
 Along with bananas and sugar carefully arranged  
 Kavi Shekhar (the poet's poet) Jotik sings this also.

SURATAPRIYA: (*to herself, laughingly*) This worthy Sir has been sent to me  
 by the grace of gods as one fit to give away all his (wealth) to me. (*To him, with folded hands*) :

This body of mine is full of pangs of separation (from a lover)  
 Though my life is avowedly attached to virtue only.  
 O Magnanimous One, why bother about things external,  
 When I, body and soul, am at your disposal ?

Honourable Sir, enter my inner apartments and rest a while.  
 Meanwhile I go to prepare the varieties of alms for you.

SNATAK: (*excitedly*) Sir, look, look : (*In Sanskrit*)

Tresses of her hair are grey, her bony cheeks are sunken,  
 Her round breasts flaccid and buttocks dry like the banks of a river.  
 This corrupt old anchoress, seeking to seduce men  
 With her wily glances, words and smiles,  
 Makes me wonder, what to say and what to do  
 With this wicked hag of an anchoress.

(*Lalit Melody, Ekatali Tal*)

Come, Oh come, you living in destitution.  
 You speak honeyed words of advice, O queen, fasting for a month,  
 Your cheeks are sunken, body bent.  
 Still you are not abandoning your wily ways.  
 Though famished, your moon-face beguiles men.  
 How many have you not deprived of life with your smiles ?  
 Loose and hanging breasts, hair turned silver grey  
 O God ! how many more will be enticed ?  
 Jyotika Kavishekhara singeth all this,  
 For King Harasimha, who knows the essence of this sentiment.

VISHVANAGAR: (*to Snatak*) Why talk rubbish ? You should not use such un-  
 gentlemanly words ? (*to Suratapriya*) Good lady ! attend to the kitchen,  
 we are also coming very shortly.

SURATAPRIYA: As your honour commands, Sir.

(*Exit*)

SNATAK: Sir, you please stay here till the alms are cooked. Meanwhile, I shall shortly join you after I have ascertained the whereabouts of Anangasena.<sup>1</sup>

VISHIVANAGAR: O my son, let us go together.

*(Both move about)*

SNATAK: Hon'ble Sir, I learn that Anangasena abides in the vicinity of the house of Mulanashak, the barber. Let us, therefore, first enquire about his abode. *(looking ahead)* O Sir, look, look, there is Anangasena looking like a damsel of the gods.

VISHIVANAGAR: Well, then, let us go ahead and approach her.

*(So saying they stand aside)*

*(Thereupon enters Anangasena)*

*(Song in Malava melody, Ektali tal)*

Well, how artful is this woman ! *(Refrain)*

Oh ! Everyday quite early in the morning she beautifies herself !

Ah ! Let all her body come to me;

Ah ! Similarly let her smiling face be mine;

And Oh ! Let me suck her handsome golden lower lip

Let her face come to me like the moon abandoning her dark spot.

Oh ! Seeing such beauty of Anangasena,

Easily one is willing to cast aside thoughts of the other world.

Rightly, Kavishekhar sings thus :

Ganeshvar, the devotee of Hari's feet, knows this.

From *Dhurtasamagama*, 13th-14th century

Tr. by Vishwanath Jha

## A Plea for a Pining Lady

### AMRITAKARA

AMRITAKARA (Amritakara, 14th-15th century) was a contemporary of Vidyapati at the court of the Oinivara rulers—Shivasimha and Bhairavasimha. Amritakara belonged to a distinguished family of administrators who had served under the Karnata and Oinivara rulers. Seven songs of this poet are extant and there is some evidence that he wrote plays too. His life spanned the greater part of the fifteenth century—from the last quarter of the 14th to the third quarter of the 15th, according to one view.

Hearing she's love-sick, you make a tryst for today.

But you do not keep your word.

Why torment one greedy for your love ?

Declare your love to her: what use is deceit, Krishna ?

1. The name of a whore.

Every woman pines for a good lover.  
 The moon alone can quench the thirst of the *chakori* bird.  
 How shall I describe her suffering?  
 She's like a flower withered even by the touch of the breeze.  
 Her lips are like coral without gleam.  
 Time cannot stand adverse circumstances  
 When the *malati* flower is full-blown, the nectar becomes stale.  
 Amrita says he obliquely sings the passion of the lady  
 For King Bhairavasimha, consort of Jasama, is a man of taste.

*Amritkarak Tirhuti*, 14th-15th century

Tr. by Umanath Jha

## Twenty-Four Poems

### VIDYAPATI

VIDYAPATI (Vidyāpati Thākura, c. 1340-1448) is unquestionably the greatest medieval Maithili writer. Like Govindadas and Lochan he was also for years mistaken as a Bengali, but now he has been firmly established as a resident of Garh Bisaphi in the district of Madhubani. He was intimately connected with the rulers of the land since King Bhogishvar (c. 1353-70) of the Qinivara dynasty of Mithila. In the course of his long life he continued to be associated with the courts of several successive kings till king Bhairavasimha (c. 1475-89). The most famous of his patrons were King Shivasimha (1412-16), *alias* Roopnarayan, and his favourite consort Lakhima, Shivasimha awarded him the title of "Abhinava Jayadeva" (New Jayadeva), alluding to the popular poet Jayadeva, the author of *Gitagovinda* (c. 1205), and made a gift of his native village Bisaphi to him on the occasion of his coronation in c. 1412.

He wrote in three languages—Sanskrit, Avahattha and modern vernacular Maithili. Among his Sanskrit works the notable ones are *Purushapariksha*, (The Test of Man) and *Durgabhaktitarangini* (The Waves of the Devotion of Goddess Durga); in *Avahattha Kirtikata* (The Vine of Glory), a panegyric prose romance on Prince Kirtisimha, and *Kirtipataka* (The Flag of Glory), another panegyric on Prince Arjunasimha and King Shivasimha. But his most popular and monumental works were written in Maithili: about a thousand lyrics, and a drama called "The Winning Over of Gorakhanatha" (Gorakhvijay) the celebrated ascetic who had once upon a time been lured to a life of worldly pleasures.

Vidyapati was a seminal writer in the vernacular. He became so popular that his lyrics were put to music and a line of famous musicians became their official singers in the court. Moreover, all over Mithila and in the neighbouring kingdoms of Assam, Bengal, Orissa and above all Nepal, his lyrical poetry became a household word. They were imitated and inspired vernacular writing in the whole of Eastern India for nearly three centuries.

Vidyapati was openly an advocate of vernacular literature, but his roots were in Sanskrit poetry which made him one of the greatest love-poets of all time. He

wrote both secular and divine poems and indeed founded several forms of them which have flourished till the present day: *Tirhuti* (poems of passionate love), *Burahamasa* (love poems of twelve months), *Uchiti* and other occasional songs of everyday life, *Nachari* (hymns to Shiva), *Maheshvani* (poems of the domestic life of Shiva and Gauri, including the latter's marriage with Shiva), etc. The common man was more attracted by *Nachari* and *Maheshvani*, but sophisticated courtly audience loved to recite the love poems.

Vidyapati's style was on the whole simple, straightforward, and mellifluous and has directly appealed to the hearts and minds of millions of common folk in Mithila during the last seven hundred years. In other lands—chiefly in Bengal—it became the source of a tradition seeped in Vaishnavism wherein Krishna as an incarnation of Vishnu was made to love the women of Braja as God loves the souls, and *vice versa*. The soul's yearning for God is like the beloved seeking the lover. This came to be known as the great Bhakti movement of medieval India. Often Vidyapati's own attitude to life, even in the love songs, is made clear in what is known as the *Banita* of a poem, that is the dialogue between the poet and his patron, or his consort which is used sometimes to sum up partly as a mocking jest but more often as the poet's comments on similar situations in the life of a common man or woman.

Broadly, his poems can therefore be divided into (1) poems of beauty, (2) poems of love, and (3) hymns and poems of disillusionment—all depicting as natural and realistic a course of human life as it could be. That is how Vidyapati's poems are regarded in Mithila. His poems of love are read and enjoyed by the literate but his hymns to Shiva and Durga and his miscellaneous poems are lived in actual life even by the semi-literate or illiterate folks. In other words, in Mithila, Radha and Krishna songs are sung at weddings, and not for spiritual guidance as in Bengal. Subtle form of courtly flattering to King Shivasimha as Krishna and his chief consort Lakhima as Radha may, however, be noticed in passing.

Below are (I). Seven poems on beauty, (II). Eleven poems on love and (III). Five hymns and one poem of disillusionment and an excerpt from *Kirtilata*.

## I

### On Beauty

#### 1

#### Krishna's Beauty

Madhav ! How should I praise your excellence ?  
 What should I compare you with, name something as your equal ?  
 The fragrance of sandal is matchless,  
 But as a piece of wood it is hard-hearted.

The moon is the lord of the world (in the night).  
 But it is bright only half the month,  
 There is no parallel to a gem,  
 But it is, however, as well-known as a stone.  
*Kanaka-Kadali*<sup>1</sup> remains shamefully small,  
 Alas! its growth is stationary.  
 O Madhab, you are yourself alone like you,  
 I imagine.  
 Love with a noble person is embarrassing  
 Says the poet Vidyapati.

Tr. by Jayakanta Mishra

2

Song of Youth

Childhood and youth both have mingled in her.  
 Her eyes have become restless as her glances dart from side to side,  
 Her words burst out slyly with every mild smile again and again,  
 The moon seems to have lighted the earth.  
 With a mirror in her hand, she adorns herself  
 And asks friends about the pleasures of love-making,  
 She intently looks at her breasts again and again when she is alone  
 And laughs at the sight of them,  
 First they were like berries, then like oranges.  
 Day after day the love-god keeps on revealing her beauty.  
 Madhab has caught sight of that wonderful young girl,  
 Where both childhood and youth had become one.  
 Vidyapati says: "you are still innocent,  
 Only a mature woman can discover the two as one."

Tr. by Jayakanta Mishra

3

Radha's Beauty

A go-between is supposed to describe the maiden's beauty to a lover  
 O Madhab, how shall I describe the beauty of the lovely one ?

---

1. A species of plantain, small in size but very delicious.

Laboriously the Creator has adorned her, and I have seen her with  
mine own eyes.  
Her feet were created as a pair of lotuses, and her gait stately as that of  
*Airavat*.  
Her thighs were made like a golden plantain. Over them He placed a slim  
lion's waist, and over it Mount Meru.  
Over Mount *Meru* He made two lotuses to bloom, and  
though without a stalk, they overflow with loveliness.  
Her jewelled necklace is like the stream of Ganga;  
and hence those lotuses are not dried up.  
Her lips are red like the *bimba* fruit, and her teeth  
like pomegranate seeds. The sun and the moon rise near them  
*Rahu* dwells afar, and does not approach to devour them  
She has eyes like a deer (*saranga*), and the voice of the  
cuckoo (*saranga*), and her eyebrows are like the bow  
(*saranga*) (of the love-god) which is fixed on (the onlookers).  
And over the bow appear ten bees<sup>1</sup> (*saranga*) who  
playfully sip the honey (the beauty of the eyebrows or the face)  
Vidyapati says: "Hear, O pretty one, there is no one in this world so beautiful  
as you.  
I say this in the presence of King Shivasimha, Roop Narayan, and Lakhima,  
his queen."

Tr: by George A. Grierson

4

### The Making of a Beautiful Damsel

(God) made her face out of the essence of the moon,  
Eyes out of the sportive eyes of the *chakora* bird,  
When the belle wiped her face with the end of her garment dipped in  
nectar,  
All the ten directions were illuminated.  
How was the pretty one's beauty constituted?  
It is not possible for me to identify the elements.  
All I can say is that she entered my eyes, and has remained there!  
She cannot work freely on account of the weight of her buttock  
Her waist has been made so slender  
That the love-god has twisted around it the creeper of the threefold row of  
hair on the stomach,

1. Dark short curls of hair dangling loosely on the forehead.

Lest it may break down.  
 Says Vidyapati, this wonder of wonders,  
 As described by me in words, is a reality.  
 The King of Mithila, Shivasimha,  
 Famous as 'Rupanamayan' (the god of beauty) knows this feeling.

*Tr.* by Jayakanta Mishra

5

A Bathing Beauty

The pretty one is bathing herself in the river.  
 No sooner had I seen her than the love-god smote my heart.  
 The water falls down in the river through the locks of her hair,  
 As if darkness is weeping on account of the domination of the moon-like  
 light of her face above.  
 Her wet garments have stuck around her limbs,  
 So that the erotic sentiments of even the saints are aroused.  
 Her breasts are like a couple of handsome *chakba* birds,  
 Which have been here united by someone of divine power.  
 Therefore she has held them fast from their herd in the snare of her arms,  
 So that they might not fly away to the sky.  
 Vidyapati says singing:  
 "A meritorious husband alone can possess such an attractive belle!"

*Tr.* by Jayakanta Mishra

6

A Damsel on the Way

O friend, I saw a polite and clever, blooming damsel  
 going on the way,  
 O friend, the Creator has made her a beauty like a gold creeper,  
 and brought her here,  
 O friend, her gait is stately as that of an elephant, and  
 she appears to be a princess.  
 He who has her as his bride will have obtained all the four  
 blessings (viz., virtue, wealth, desire and salvation).  
 O friend, she has wrapped her body with a blue dress, and  
 made the braids of her hair on the head.       "

Over it, O friend, a bee has sat with open wings imbibing nectar.  
 O friend, her waist is like that of a lion, and her eye like the lotus.  
 Vidyapati sang thus, O friend, truly she has gained every grace.

*Tr.* by George A. Grierson

7

### Warning to Beauty

O, Beauty ! Cover your face with the border of your garment.  
 I hear the moon has been stolen away from the kingdom.  
 The watchmen are making a house-to-house search for it,  
 Soon you might be accused.  
 (Moreover) do not sleep in the open and do not look at anybody,  
*Rahu* may mistake your face for the moon and swallow it.  
 (Further) do not freely open your eyes  
 Lest the string of (the hunter's net) may catch them  
     (mistaking your eyes to be) wagtails  
 (Also) do not let the nectar of your smiles overflow,  
 Lest the rich merchants might claim as their own  
 The wealth of your pearl-like teeth set near the boundary of  
 Your vermilion-like rosy lower lip through their lustre.

*Tr.* by Jayakanta Mishra

II

### On Love

I

#### The Nature of Love

O friend ! you ask me what I feel of love ?  
 As I describe it, every minute  
     it grows new,  
 All my life I've seen intently the beauty of my beloved  
     still my eyes have remained insatiated;  
 His gentle voice I have heard long intently,  
     But still it has not yet fully entered my ears;  
 Many honeyed nights of enjoyment I have passed with him  
     But still I long for more: the sports of love hold new delights  
 Aeon after aeon I have kept him inside my heart  
     But still I long to have him.



None of the numerous lovers

Have ever been able to gauge the feeling of love.

Says Vidyapati: Myriads have loved happily

But not one of them has been able to cool his earnest craving for it.

Tr. by Jayakanta Mishra

2

### How the Woman Cannot Relent in a Love Quarrel

If a poor person has some wealth

He becomes anxious to do something big.

If a fox gets horns (on the top of its head)<sup>1</sup>

It begins to think that it could overturn a hill.

O messenger, I have understood your words

(But) if the moon abandons its route, shall the *Rahu* abandon eclipsing it?

If the flies refuse to run on the lamp

Shall that be an occasion to cover the fire?

Even those whose faces are crooked

Desire to make fun of others.

Who does not know that even a small fish turns

And jumps in shallow waters?

Similarly, though I am the custodian of all poison

Shall even the harmless *dhondha* serpent think itself as poisonous?

Says Vidyapati: The water-lily in the ditch water may take pride in itself.

But it is not competent to ridicule the lotus in a lake.

Tr. by Jayakanta Mishra

3

### Time of Enjoyment is Over

O Hari, Hari, hear me patiently,

Now is not the hour of dalliance,

The stars which glittered in the sky,

Are no more to be seen;

And the *chakaba* and the peacock have

Already finished their songs,

The disc of the moon is growing dim,

1. An unusual thing, an impossibility.

The village cows are wandering forth to graze in the field,  
 The bees are settling on the water lilies,  
 My lips stained red with betel leaves have lost their brilliance:  
 This is not the time for enjoyment.  
 Vidyapati says: This is not a good action,  
 The whole world will ridicule you.

*Tr.* by George A. Grierson

4

A Song for Tryst

O moon, do not rise tonight,  
 I have sent a message to my lover !  
 I shall entreat the month of rains (Shravan)  
 Which makes it convenient to have a tryst.  
 I shall smilingly persuade *Rahu*  
 To eclipse the moon tonight.  
 O clouds, I shall present you with a million gems,  
 Thicken the darkness tonight.  
 Says Vidyapati, it will be a successful tryst  
 For, good people indeed are helpful to others.

*Tr.* by Jayakanta Mishra

5

O Beloved Befooled by False Pride

O friend, what should I say of my folly ? I lost the whole night in pride.  
 When my heart was softened, the cruel dawn appeared on the scene.  
 The elders had got up, how could then there be any sport ?  
 I hid my body and became confused.  
 I had wished to show my superior cleverness but turned out to be foolish.  
 I had coveted additional interest on the principal pleasures, but ended by  
 losing even the principal amount itself.  
 Vidyapati says: It was a fault of her own mind.  
 Having obtained an opportunity, one should never lose it by showing  
 false anger out of pride.

*Tr.* by George A. Grierson

## 6

## A Maiden Regrets her Hasty Love

*(Addressed to a go-between)*

Your words are sweet like nectar,  
 That is why my mind was misled,  
 I did not see where good or evil would accrue.  
 But it does not behove a good man to steal.  
 O friend, what good it is to complain now?  
 One who does not think before he acts  
 Has to repent afterwards.  
 At that time I overlooked  
 My loss due to the disgrace of my family  
 As the dart of the love-god struck my heart.  
 None makes a purchase indiscriminately,  
 Even while purchasing a *gunja*<sup>1</sup> seed.  
 Who is he so foolish as to drown himself in a well  
 At the behest of another.  
 I knew lovers behave like bees,  
 But, O friend, I did not take him to be so.  
 Even though I was educated and accomplished, I forgot everything  
 And acted foolishly: it was none of your fault,  
 Says Vidyapati: Listen you, O maiden!  
 Do not lose your heart.  
 King Roopnarayan (Maharaja Shivasimha) the lover  
 Rises like a new moon and gives the hope of reunion.

Tr. by Jayakanta Mishra

## 7

## The Tale of a Woman's Woes

Let not there be the rebirth of a person.  
 If one has to be reborn,  
 Let him not be born as a young woman.  
 If one has to be reborn as a young woman,  
 Let her not be conversant with the taste of love.

1. An infinitesimally small weighing unit.

If one has the taste of love,  
 Let her not belong to a noble family (*Refrain*).  
 Helpless, I ask you, O Creator, to grant me at least  
 The favour of stability at the end of my life,  
 I should have a polite and loving husband  
 Who should not be submissive to the will of another, but be my darling.  
 But even if he happens to be submissive to another,  
 Let him (my lover) be considerate,  
 For, no woman can be unhappy if she receives consideration,  
 (If even then there is misery in the life of a woman),  
 Vidyapati says: She may get over the life of discord  
 by giving it up by killing herself.

Tr. by Jayakanta Mishra

8

Not Vamadeva but Vama<sup>1</sup>

(A love-lorn lady laments her plight)

O god of love, how much more torments you would inflict on me ?  
 Mistake me not for (your erstwhile enemy) Shiva,  
 I am just a common young maiden:  
 I have not on my body the embellishment of ashes, but the dust of  
 sandal wood  
 I have not (the dress of) the lion's skin, but the garment of  
 (multicoloured) silk.  
 I have not the braid of matted hair, but the braid of common hair.  
 (I have) not on my head the stream of Ganga, but garlands  
 of white flowers.  
 I have not the circular light of the moon on my forehead but the  
 spots of sandal paste,  
 I have not the blaze of Shiva's third eye, but the line of vermilion  
 on my forehead.  
 I have not the poison in the throat like Shiva but the application  
 of charming musk,  
 I have not the many fangs of serpents hanging from the neck but a  
 necklace of pearls.

1. Vamadeva—Shiva; Vama—maiden.

Says Vidyapati : O listen! God of Love, all your misunderstanding is for one fault of mine—that my name is formed with the word *vama* in common with the name of Shiva (known as *Vamadeva*).

Tr. by Jayakanta Mishra

9

### The Agony of Love

Sandal-wood paste is now as intolerable as an arrow to me, and my ornaments are a burden.

Hari, the upholder of the mountain in Gokul, does not appear to me even in my dreams.

I shall be standing alone beneath the *kadamba* tree, seeking Murari on the road.

Separated from Hari, my body burns and my garments have lost their brightness.

Speed you, speed you, O Uddhav, go to Mathura.

The moon-faced damsel can no longer live:

Why should Hari be blamed as her murderer?

Says Vidyapati, O good woman, hear me with mind and body,

Today Hari will come to Gokul. Hasten and look for him on the road.

Tr. by George A. Grierson

10

### Plea to Avoid Separation

Madhav, go not to distant foreign land.

You will take with you all my happiness and enjoyment also.

What gift will you bring me?

As soon as you shall reach a distant land, you will change your mind,

And you will, O my lord, forget me.

Diamond, gem, ruby, I ask none of these

But again and again only beg for you, my love.

In the past whenever you, my love, did depart,

My eyes were filled with tears and I could not even see you.

Though my lord dwelt in the same city, he was in the service of another person.

So how could he fulfil my desires?

Fair women, when united with their husbands,  
 Like stars around the moon, are happy in their love:  
 Says Vidyapati: Hear, O good young maiden,  
 Keep this precious point in your heart.

*Tr. by George A. Grierson*

II

An Uchiti Song

*(A song in praise of truly superior men)*

A great man even when angered with one he loves, does not give up his  
 love for him.  
 The crow and the cuckoo are the same kin. The beetle and the bee  
 resemble each other.  
 Gold and turmeric are alike in colour, yet how different !  
 I distinguish the good from the bad by their qualities,  
 and not by their appearances.  
 Though a jewel be covered with mud, still its qualities are not destroyed.  
 Vidyapati says, take it for granted that a good husband will not drive his wife  
 to extremities.

*Tr. by George A. Grierson*

III

Hymns and Poems of Disillusionment

I

A Prayer to Durga

Victory, Victory to you, O Terrible Goddess ! Fearful to the Demons,  
 You are the Creative Spouse of (Shiva), the Lord of the Universe !  
 Grant me a straightforward righteous mentality as a boon,  
 O Family Deity!  
 By following your footsteps alone, one can attain salvation!  
 Your feet are all the time, day and night, on the dead body of Shiva,  
 And your hair on the top of your head have the jewel of the moon.  
 Many demons you have killed and devoured in your mouth,  
 And many demons you have thrown out of your mouth.

Your dark-coloured face with deep red eyes  
 Looks as if a red flower is blooming in the midst of dark lotuses,  
 Or, on the appearance of dark clouds, red lotuses are blooming on  
     the lake waters.  
 Your pale lips are muttering, producing terrific sounds,  
 Resembling the bubbling foams of blood in a battlefield.  
 Your feet have anklets with inciting bells profusely,  
 Stirring warlike sentiments,  
 Your cutlass is brandishing noisily,  
 Says poet Vidyapati: I am a worshipper of your feet,  
 Pray do not forget your son, O mother !

*Tr. by Jayakanta Mishra*

2

Hymn to Shiva

Today, 'O Lord, it would be the height of pleasure for me  
 If, O Shiva, you could take to dance and play on a tabor.  
 O Gauri, you ask me to dance,  
     But how shall I do that ?  
 Four considerations prohibit me;  
     How should I avoid them ?  
 The nectar from my head would drop  
     And the lion in my waist  
 Would come alive and eat up my bull.  
 And all the snakes on his head would fall  
 And the peacock of Kartikeya would eat them all.  
 And the Ganga waters in my hair  
 .Becoming uncontrollable would overflow  
 And all the skulls in my neck would become alive,  
 And all the skulls in the *Shamshan*<sup>1</sup> would revive  
 And all over, the *Shamshan* would be filled with living dead bodies.  
 Vidyapati sings: Shiva, however, accepted the request of  
     Gauri and danced  
 Without inciting any one of the above troubles.

*Tr. by Jayakanta Mishra*

1. Cremation ground.

Another Hymn

O Shiva, when will you ward off my sufferings ?  
 I was born in misery; I will have to pass my days in misery.  
 I did not experience happiness even in dream, O Shiva,  
 Beside (a pinch of) rice and sandalwood paste, and some  
     water of Ganga,  
 I shall also offer to you the leaves of *bel* tree.  
 If this sea of the world is bottomless)  
 O Shiva, the terrible, hold my hands (and help me cross it),  
 Says Vidyapati: My refuge (from the ills of the world) is Shiva.  
 O, bless me with the boon of fearlessness !

*Tr.* by Jayakanta Mishra

/

Hymn to Ganga

I found great comfort on your banks. As I leave it, mine eyes are filled with  
     tears,  
 With folded hands I adore your pure waves: Holy Ganga, may I see you  
     again !  
 One fault you will please pardon, knowing it to be mine, namely, that I  
     have touched your water, O Mother, with my feet.  
 Why need I perform silent prayers, or penance, devotion, or pious medita-  
     tion?  
 My life has become blessed by just one dip in your waters,  
 Says Vidyapati: My prayer to you is this, forget me not in the hour of my  
     death.

*Tr.* by George A. Grierson

5

A Maheshavani

I shall leave this house,  
     If the son-in-law is an old man !  
 In the first instance, the Creator was deaf,  
     Then, this father of the girl (my husband).



In the third instance the Brahman (Narada), the negotiator  
 Who brought such a bridegroom, O my mother.  
 I shall first destroy the tabor,  
 Then, dismember the garland of skulls,  
 And drive away the bull and the members of the *barat* party, O my mother,  
 And snatch away my daughter, O my mother.  
 His loin-cloth, water-container, almanac and books  
 I shall get all these forcibly snatched away  
 If that Brahman (Narada) dares intervene,  
 He would be forcibly dragged down by the chin.  
 Says Vidyapati: O Manaini, listen !  
 Carefully consider the situation,  
 And perform the marriage of Gauri with your blessings.  
 For, after all, Shiva and Gauri match each other, O my mother !

*Tr:* by Jayakanta Mishra

o

### Futility of the Years Spent Away

O years ! where have you fled and left me in the lurch ?  
 Serving you all my life has been swept off,  
 Still I could not make you mine.  
 My childhood needed and you fed it with  
 The sweet milk of my mother  
 Under the shadow of the two fruits of prosperity you made me sleep  
 My tender, green days.  
 Now with teeth fallen, mouth toothless,  
 Bereft of all arrogance,  
 I watch sedately the three worlds from afar,  
 Like a snake that has cast off its slough;  
 Rubbing the eyes again and again without gaining any clear sight,  
 Having all hair on the head turned into a forest of white *kash* grass,  
 And cough obstructing both the outside and the inside of my body.

From *Kirtilata Padavali*, 14th-15th century

*Tr:* by Jayakanta Mishra

### Kirtilata

VIDYAPATI

*Kirtilata* (Kirtilatā, c. 1402-05) is the first major work of the poet VIDYAPATI (c.1340-1448) in Maithili. It is important because it announced the advent of a

new poet. It is also important because it openly declared the desirability of writing literary works in the mother tongue instead of Sanskrit and Prakrit. Thirdly, it describes the contemporary condition of life in realistic details, particularly in a Muslim-dominated countryside.

Some people have questioned the accuracy of the historical facts mentioned in this work. But it is a work of literature and not of history—it is rather a poem, a story, and above all a good piece of writing. Therefore, even if the poet has exaggerated or ignored or erred in giving historical facts, it need not be condemned as unsuccessful.

The story of *Kirtilata* is a kind of panegyric on the ruling king of Mithila Maharaja Kirtisimha (c.1402) and it seeks to glorify his efforts to get back the kingdom from the hands of the murderer of his father King Bhogishwara. The romantic charm of the piece lies in the description of the journey he makes to Emperor Ibrahim Shah of Jaunpur and his wanderings alongwith the emperor's army. The point of attraction, however, lies in the conditions of living in 15th century city of one of the celebrated kingdoms of the day. The Sharqui Empire of Jaunpur was at its peak, in particular the bazar, the residences and the buildings and the gardens were well set and highly organized.

The poetic qualities and the interesting details in the work together make *Kirtilata* a classic. The language is deliberately archaic so that it may be little different from the familiarity and rusticity of everyday prose. Such self-consciousness of prose literature in the vernacular was quite common. Even verse was elevated and heightened. Still it is remarkably intelligible even to modern speakers of Maithili.

### The Vine of Fame

(In Pali Metre)

Both the princes started on foot  
 Everybody in the troupe adored Hari (God)  
 They crossed numerous uninhabited large tracts of land,  
 Halting at regular intervals,  
 They heard about the great fame of the late King Bhogai (Bhogishwar).  
 Whenever they visited any village  
 Some gave them garments, others liquid curd,  
 Some offered food items,  
 Some joined their troupe,  
 Yet others became attendants,  
 Some gave them loans,  
 Others helped them cross the rivers,  
 Some carried their luggage,  
 Others guided them on to short routes,

Some welcomed them with humility,  
 They thus made the long journey in several days.  
 Surely, prosperity lies in making effort, and success lies in courage;  
 Wherever the wise man goes, there alone prosperity is gained.  
 At that time they saw a city whose name was Jaunpur.  
 It was a feast to the eyes and the store-house of prosperity.

### *Verses*

They saw a beautiful city surrounded by waters washing its feet  
 The buildings had floors of stone, pillars of walls and sloping roofs.  
 Gardens of mango and *champak* were adorned with a lot of new leaves,  
 flowers and fruits  
 The humming of black bees intoxicated with drinking honey of the flowers.  
 There were well-laid dams and tanks having stylish  
 openings (i.e. paths or gates) and most handsome buildings.  
 Even grown up men lost their sense of direction amongst the great diversity  
 of crooked by-paths and straight roads  
 Thousands of Shiv-temples graced with staircases, arched doorways,  
 fountains, small-tanks, groves of *kadamba* trees, clean flags and  
 gold-pitchers at the top were visible.  
 Women having eyes like the petals of 'land'-lotuses and the gait of the  
 hilarious elephants looked at the passers by on the cross-roads were  
 turning back their heads again and again  
 Camphor, saffron, incense and the objects used for fragrance, fans hair of  
 chowries used as fans, lampblack for eyes and garments.  
 Were sold by traders at current rates and brought home by the 'Turuks'  
 (Muslims)

All the people spent their time in honouring, making gifts,  
 marriages, festivities, drama and literature,  
 And in entertaining guests, observance of ideal conduct, discretion and in  
 entertainments.  
 They used to travel, play, laugh, look this way and that, and walk,  
 They decorated elephants and big horses and went in blind alleys  
 and failed to find their way out.

Moreover it may be said, two princes entered the city haltingly wandering  
 through hundreds of markets and paths, walking through crossings of small  
 localities or suburbs. How to describe the immense specialities or impressive  
 layout of the main (and big) gates; attic houses, lanes, palaces, carriages,  
 irrigation wells, bathing staircases, conical embellished building tops, city

walls, etc. The city appeared like an incarnation of Amaravati (the city of gods).

And in this way they first entered the market-place filled with the din born out of the articles of the eight *kunds* of metal being manufactured, the noise of the bronze articles being flattened or broadened as well as that of the walking feet (or consequent crowd) of the inhabitants of the city. The markets respectively dealing with grains, gold, etc., betels, cooked food-items (especially prepared from grains or corns) and fishes, were full of people talking loudly. It will be a total lie but it was certainly apparent as if the great oceans had transgressed their limits and flooded the whole area filling one's ears with the tumult of the resounding and roaring waves.

Such were the hustle and noise of the midday that it seemed as if all sorts of objects and corns from all over the earth had come here for sale. People got thoroughly muffled or rather crushed in the crowd of men. Thus the paste mark of sandalwood etc. of one person got imprinted on the body of another; the bracelet of others' wives were broken by even honourable persons; the sacred thread of Brahmins touched chests of the *Chandakas*. The breasts of harlots crushed the chests of the deeply religious men bearing sacred long beards, the elephants and horses went with their bodies very close together, and the destitutes verily got completely crushed. The mixing together and moving apart of people in the heavy crowd gave one the impression of an ocean of men.

### *Verses*

When traders of various descriptions came to wander in the markets  
 Within moments people could sell everything and all did purchase something  
 or the other.  
 All round things were on display, appearing as embodiments of beauty,  
 youth and virtues.  
 Saleswomen used to sit together with hundreds of urban  
 lady-companions.  
 They all on some pretext or the other talked and exchanged  
 gossips,  
 Sold and bought things at their own sweet will, mutually sharing the joy of  
 glancing etc. as a result.  
 The young women cast loving glances on all the simple-eyed persons.  
 The damsels having secret love affairs were apparently guilty conscious!  
 Many a Brahmin, Kayastha and Kshatriya as well as common people of  
 various other castes sat and chatted together at several places,  
 All saintly persons, all the rich men and the king of the city were higher in  
 rank than the common people of the city.

Just as one enjoys seeing a rich man at the main entrance of a temple  
So one's face sparkled with joy as if a moon had risen in every house.

After going through one market they visited the other. While passing through the vicinity of the path they saw many buildings belonging to the prostitutes, the making of which must have entailed heavy efforts on the part of Vishwakarma (the gods' engineer).

It is verily difficult to describe the variety and the highlights of this area. The upward shooting lines of the aromatic vapours of the hair of some prostitutes reaching even the North Star (Dhruva). Some of these behaved or acted in a manner that it appeared that the black spot in the moon has been actually formed with the lampblack used in their eyes. Their modesty was unnatural and their young looks were artificial. These were exhibited by them for earning wealth, they showed good manners out of greed and a desire to gain good fortune. Moreover, these (prostitutes) applied red vermilion on their foreheads even without having living husbands. It is only adding to one's sins to describe these matter in detail.

### *Verses*

As the qualified are neglected and the fraudulent are honoured,  
So certainly does Cupid dwell in the houses of the prostitutes.

When one watched the prostitutes dressing and beautifying themselves for pleasure, placed well designed and spread out beautiful marks of sandalwood (paste etc.) near (i.e. on and also just below) the locks of hair (on the forehead), putting on 'divine' garments, tying (i.e. binding or knotting) together the separate locks of hair by tossing them upwards time and again, sending female companions hither and thither, looking with a smile, mature, beautiful and adept in joking, one was bound to make up his mind to denounce the (pursuit of the) three other (ends of human life, i.e. dharma, artha and moksha) in favour of sex alone.

There used to be flowers in the prostitute's hair, which made one feel as though darkness (i.e. the hair) was laughing at the fallen condition of the ashamed twilight of the faces of respectable citizens. There used to be bends (or ups and downs) of the creeper-like eye-brows, it appeared as though the big silver white fishes (eyeballs) were tossing up in the waves of the rivers of lampblack. The very thin line of vermilion (borne in the middle of their hair on the foreheads) which could not be condemned (as a generally accepted custom among ladies) appeared the first sign of the glory of the victory of Cupid. They were unblemished and slim in the middle (i.e. had a thin waist). Due to the very heavy weight of the breasts, they appeared to

be in a hurry to run away. They wanted to conquer the youth in the three spheres (i.e. the entire universe) by means of the movements of the two corners and the middle (thus the three parts) of their (beautiful) eyes. They spoke sweetly. The kings appeared graceful, (before them); some of them yearned for the air (or physical proximity) of the borders of the garments (of the prostitutes).

The niceties of their sharp and vicious looks in the shape of arrows of Cupid pierced, so to say, the hearts of the citizens. They, however, let the men who proclaimed themselves as cows (i.e. innocent or uncultured novices in the art of making love) go (untouched)

### *Couplet*

All women (in Jaunpur) were wonderful (clever or accomplished) and men well placed  
Because of the qualities of the Shah (Ibrahim Shah the ruler), there was neither worry nor grief.

### *Chopai Metre*

Their eyes were gratified on looking in all the directions,  
One got good accommodation and food at all places.  
O learned men, kindly listen with some care,  
The characteristics of the Turuks (Muslims).

### *Bhujangapraya.ta Metre*

Thereafter the two princes entered (that) market  
Where there were lakhs of horses and hundreds of elephants.  
At some places the crude Hindus were being driven out.  
At other places wine cups and large mud vessels were spread out.  
At some other places were found in plenty the shopkeepers of arrows and bows.  
On either side of the road were seen overflowing cups of wine.  
They were wine, interchanging sides of the balance, garlic and onion  
Slaves were bought in abundance  
Salaams (salutations) were commonly exchanged all the time amongst the turuks (Turks).  
Wallets, anklets and socks were being sold,  
Meers, Ballees, Salaars and Khojas (names of different cadres or ranks in the army) were seen abundantly wandering about

They were addressing (one another with the terms) 'Abe' and 'Be' (meaning O listen, thee) and drinking wine

Reciting 'Quariba' (and telling 'Kalamas' (stories)

Embroidering and filling (as well as attending) Masajids (and also)

Reading books they called 'Kitabs' were countless turuks (Muslims in that place).

They prayed to what they called *Khuda* in all seriousness and then consumed the powder of *bhang* (intoxicant hemp).

Without enough reason they would easily become angry and their face would become red like a heated pitcher of copper.

The Turuk would go about riding on horses and demanded *Heda* (a kind of tax).

Making sure to remain unseen they ran out and spit upon the beards

I how should we describe their acts of indiscretion and deceitfulness. They always marched on the roads with the pedestrian followers behind them.

They would spend all their money on hot *kabab* (a kind of delicious meat preparation)

The Yavan (Turuka Muslim) asked for being served *bhang*, but on the slightest delay got infuriated and acted in the fashion of a *Khan* (a big gun, an influential officer)

They ran out and shouted to one saying, "I shall tear off your heart or chest, i.e. kill you in a moment or bring me that O Bastard."

As soon as they had put the first handful of food inside their mouth

They would keep quiet for a moment but soon afterwards abuse people with the term *Gandu* (i.e. one habitually being raped).

They were after gentle people with arrows, but when the gentleman would make them sit holding by hand

Even though others brought him food, fragrance like camphor they called for onion only.

Dancers expert in singing, sang songs rapturously

The female Turuks (Muslim women) danced *Charakh* (a kind of dance), other things (dance etc.) were not liked by them.

The Saiyyads (the upper-class Muslims) and their concubines left out portions of food after meals—such left-out food of everyone was eaten by everyone.

Begging saints (Fakirs) showered blessings, but when they got no alms in the houses they went away cursing the inhabitants,

Devilists (Makhdooms) almost begged in tens of households for their livelihood like the lowliest class (Doms in Hindus)

One need not repent for the judges before whom one's wife was passed off as or became another's.

FURTHER

The homes of the Hindus and the Turuks were not grouped properly, in the home of one religion those of another religion was ridiculed  
At some place one heard *Namaj* (Muslim prayer), *Vēda* recitals at other places.

*Bismillah* at one place and *Karna Chheda* (the piercing of the ear in the Hindus) at other places.

*Khoja* (Muslim soothsayer) at some place and *Ojha* (Hindu exorcists) at other places.

At one place one heard of *Nakta* (*vrata*) (i.e. Hindu 'one meal a day fast') at one place and *Roja* (a fast, month-long fast of Muslims) at other places.

*Tamburu* or Kamandalu, (begging bowl of the ascetics in Hindus) at one place and *Kuja* (that of Muslims) at other places.

*Namaj* (Muslim prayer) at one place and *Pooja* (that of Hindus) at other places.

At some places the Turuks forcibly caught the wayfarers for forced labour  
The Turuks forcibly brought out the initiated Brahmin boy,  
And put the (meat of) cow-calf on his head and licked off the sacred sandalwood round mark on the foreheads of Brahmins and tore their sacred threads.

They would seem to mount the horses on the Brahmin's body.

They prepared wine from washed paddy etc.

They built *Masjids* after destroying temples.

The land was flooded with horse stables after destroying the houses for cows.

So much so that there was no empty land to put one's feet on it so to say

The Turuks shouted at the Hindus and kept them out even from a distance

Even insignificant Turuks meted out threats.

On seeing a Turuk one got the impression that he shall at once eat up (finish off) the crowd of Hindus.

Long live the Sultan under whose influence even this situation could flourish.

The two princes went on wandering from one market to the other.

They then deliberately entered the court of the Shah out of curiosity.

*Tribhangi Metre*

The open court (poetically the great horizon or sky, i.e. important scene) was filled with groups of people moving in diverse ways.

Even big stone pieces got crushed under the weight of the feet of in-coming Turuks, Khans and Maliks.

Great kings even from far-off lands raced to the gates and were seen loitering.



The prince came out of the open court wishing to take rest in a shady place.

One could not count the number of servants (Gulams)

In-coming kings largely stood at the houses of the Saiyyads (i.e. the uppermost lords)

Days together passed off sitting in the court. It seemed they could not have an audience with the Sultan for years.

The Khans and Amirs of noble families knew the pleasures of the palace. They kept on coming at will in the court after getting rewards or benefits from the Sultan due to their offering salutations to Him.

They came from across the seas and the mountains and from different islands on the gates of those rulers—but all the small kings, princes and kings stood bare-footed

Seeing the pomp and brilliance of the Sultan they lived there reckoning his specialities and singing or describing his greatnesses.

How could one count the number of people coming, going and performing their assigned duties?

That court was graced by the princes of Telanga, Banga, Chola and Kalinga. They spoke in their own languages, they with great courage and tremblingly uttered praises of the Sultan such as 'Victory to the Brave', 'Victory to the Learned'.

The sons of the Kings in great numbers walked hither and thither, looked graceful in silken garments.

Fond of battles they bared other's ears or minds by their Gandharva like beauty.

That Special Court was far above the other courts in the whole expanse of earth in gaiety and magnificence.

There even the poorest could transact business with the Sultan.

There were friends, there were enemies, everyone's head bowed

There was peace and happiness, there was no fear of the world.

The separate strengths of fortune and misfortune respectively, became clear to all those who went there.

This emperor was above all the people (i.e. subjects etc.), only the creator was above him (the Sultan).

From *Kirtilata*, 14th-15th century

Tr. by Rudrakanta Mishra

## The Forsaken Lover

GAJASIMHA

GAJASIMHA (15th century) was one of the several medieval song-writers who came after Vidyapati and adopted his mode. In the *bhanitas*, a kind of identity

tags, of his songs – only five of which are extant – he mentions the name of Purushottama as his patron. This ruler belonged to the second half of the fifteenth century. So the period of his works is known, but no other biographical material is available.

Full of glee was I till now, but no more.  
 The beggar has lost his only precious possession:  
 The world is empty for him now.  
 Destiny is pitiless;  
 For what fault was the fair one snatched from me ?  
 Wish I could swallow poison, but suicide is a sin.  
 Yet my life is like death and death is attractive.  
 Gajasimha says: Listen O forsaken ones,  
 Your suffering will end.  
 King Purushottama has experienced this;  
 His compassion will unite you.

*Gajasimhak Tirhuti*, 15th century

*Tr.* by Umanath Jha

## Will He Return?

GOPINATHA

Only two of the songs of GOPINATHA (Gopinātha, 15th century) have been brought to light. In the *bhanita*, the poet mentions Lakhaminarayana as his patron. A ruler of Moranga, in Nepal, bore this name; and the court of Moranga is known to have extended its patronage to scholars and poets from Mithila.

My lord could not stand my absence once:  
 Will he return and slake my heart, I wonder.  
 Friend, I shudder even to speak about it.  
 Had I foreseen this suffering,  
 Poison would I have swallowed without hesitation.  
 Fain would I have fetched him and clung to him.  
 But there are wild tracts in the way, and rivers difficult to cross.  
 I am wasting my youth in vain hope; and youth,  
 That precious jewel, once lost, no efforts can recover.  
 If eyes were wings, I would have flown to him.  
 Says poet Gopinatha: The goal is unattainable without courage and divine aid;  
 And King Lakhaminarayana understands your plight.

*Gopinathak Tirhuti*, 15th century

*Tr.* by Umanath Jha

## Two Hymns

### GOVINDA

GOVINDA (15th-16th century) was a minister in the court of Kamsanarayana. One of his nineteen extant songs is found in a play called *Nalacharitanataka*. But whether this poet wrote plays too, or just one of his compositions was incorporated in the play, or whether another Govinda was the author of the play, *Nalacharitanataka*, cannot be ascertained. Govinda's ancestors were related to the Oinivara rulers and had settled in Singhavara, a village near Darbhanga town. The selected pieces are two hymns to Lord Shiva. The first one presents a playful image of his *ardhanarishwar* form, that is, half Shiva and half Parvati.

#### 1

#### Hymn to Shiva

The moon, *damaru*, the bull, the tiger-skin,  
Ganga, the bow, the snake-bracelet and the rosary:  
Whatever Shiva staked, he lost every time to Parvati.  
He staked all and lost all. Empty-handed,  
He looked for half-stakes and lost half his body to Parvati.  
Ashamed, Shiva hung down his head and then with glee  
Clasped her to his bosom.

Govinda says, Shiva is a cunning gambler,  
Let him and his consort grant all your wishes.

*Govindak Nachari*, 15th-16th century

*Tr.* by Umanath Jha

#### 2

#### Hymn to Shiva

Thinking that Shiva is benevolent, I became his slave.  
That he was crooked, I could not surmise  
I expected to get wealth some day: a vain hope of the poor.  
None of the four objects of life did I get. My body became useless.  
Time passed, and with it youth, with unfulfilled desires.  
Why has Shiva become forgetful?  
Did my offerings, like a poor man's gifts, invite contempt ?  
Or was it just my ill-luck ?

I did not turn my thoughts to Vishnu, but  
 Put all my faith and trust in Shiva:  
 How can a devoted wife invite ridicule by serving two masters ?  
 O Lord of the Universe, compassionate to devotees,  
 You are my only refuge.  
 With faltering steps I seek Shiva's protection:  
 Thus says the good poet Govinda.

*Govindak Nachari*, 15th-16th century

Tr. by Umanath Jha

## The Song of Salhes

ANONYMOUS

*Git Salhesak* (16th century) is a folk-ballad which is very popular among the lower classes. Salhes was the first watchman and is worshipped by Dusadhs whose profession is said to be stealing as well as acting as watchmen.

The song is distinguished for its colloquial flavour, brisk narrative style and melodious harmony. It is written in prose and chanted, rather than sung.

The selected passage describes the theft in the palace of a legendary King Bhimsen by Chuhar Mal, the chief of thieves. It is remarkable how the skilful Dauna Malin, the wife of Salhes, succeeds in rescuing her husband from the charge of negligence of duty and bringing the culprit to book.

Morning came, and the cuckoo sang. Up rose Malin, and taking a flower basket, she stood in the garden. She plucked the flowers, and tied a garland for Salhes. At that moment there came a thief from a strange country. His name was Chuhar Mal, and his home was in the fort of Mokama. At midday he roamed from house to house. He wandered through Pakaria, noting houses, but in Pakaria he could not find a house worthy of him. He searched and searched and found the palace of King Bhimsen. Chuhar Mal noted the palace and went away, and rested in the *jangal* two or three *kos* off. He commenced to meditate on Asavari, his family goddess: "I have worshipped you in the fort of Mokama since my birth. Throughout my life I have never committed a theft, but I have heard that the young Salhes was born in Pakaria. He is a great man, and hath undertaken the guardianship as *chaukidar* of fourteen *kos* in Pakaria. Such fear is there of his prowess that no one's foot is firm to commit a theft in his beat."

It was on hearing this report that Chuhar Mal had come to attack Salhes. He tied his pig-tail into a tight knot, and his body-cloth tightly round his waist. On every limb he tied tens of thousands of knives, and by his side a shield. First he took a knife in his hand and sat upon the earth. Then he took his position, and lying upon his belly on the ground, began to dig a mine. He

kept himself underground for a distance of two or three *kos*, and as he dug, he arrived within the kingdom of Pakaria.

As morning dawned he began to dig into the king's stronghold, and as he dug he broke in at the quiet room in which Queen Hansabati was sleeping on a golden bed. It was there that Chuhar Mal, the thief entered. Close to her head he broke into the room, and rested against the bed. Trust not the caste of Dusadhs ! He raised his head and looked about the house for property, but could find none. He only saw Hansabati sleeping on the golden bed, and tens of thousands of jewels on her limbs. Chuhar Mal looked at them, and considered what thing he should take. "I will take two things, the golden bed, and the necklace on the neck of the queen." As he said this, morning came, and therefore he cut the necklace from the neck of the queen and, lifting her up, laid her on King Bhimsen's (empty) bed, and took the golden bed upon his head.

As morning broke, he made off through the tunnel for four *kos*, and then emerged from it in the midst of the forest. Immediately he dressed himself as a traveller, and forcibly went off with his booty to Mokama fort. As he came at the meeting of the rivers on the Ganges banks, a watch of the day had passed. Then he addressed the Ganges thus, "Hear, O Ganga, I have committed theft, and come to you, and it is from the kingdom of the hills, and from the fort of King Bhimsen, and from the beat of Salhes, that I bring the booty. If ever Salhes comes in search of me, let him not pass over you. If ever you bear him across, at that hour will I be enraged, and by the power gained by my virtues, will I bind your streams with a dam." He spoke so far and crossed the river into the land of Magadh, and from the land of Magadh went to Mokama fort, and buried his booty within the inmost of seven houses. All this time the sleep of the queen in her palace was not broken, nor did any one wake up. In the palace the first to wake up was the damsel Salkhi.

She bore a broom and swept the court-yard, and then stood in the verandah of the palace. Then she began to think to herself about the queen, "How can a woman stay so long in bed when her husband is not with her." So she dropped her broom and ran into the inner chamber, and opening the door awakened Queen Hansabati. "Rise, Lady, rise, you sleep soundly; some thief has come and dug a mine into the house." As she spoke, Queen Hansabati arose, and seeing the mine, cried out aloud. By that time all the servants had run up and surrounded the house on all sides, searching for traces of the thief, but nowhere could they find him. Then Queen Hansabati began to weep, and weeping to call on the name of the king. At length, weeping and weeping, she tore her upper garment for paper, and rubbed off the collyrium of her eyes for ink. She pared the little finger of her left hand for a pen, and began to write a letter. "I would tell king Bhimsen about the theft. A theft had taken place in the fort. From his birth Salhes has been its *chaukidar*, tell

him to produce the thief and his booty. Till then, let him not be set at liberty." Such a letter did she write, and told the damsel to call a man-servant, and sent the letter by him to King Bhimsen.

About midday the letter reached the king. He saw the letter, and flew into a rage. At once he told all his *Banaudhia* (forest) peons to arrest Salhes, and bring him before him. Away ran all the *Banaudhias*, but Salhes hid himself, and nowhere could they find a trace of him. Then they searched throughout Pakaria, and through the swamps and marshes. They searched through the mountains of Tarengana, but nowhere did they find a trace of Salhes. Broken-hearted they sat in a fallow field, and began to hang their heads in shame. Just then an old woman-traveller passed along the road, and began to ask them why so many *Banaudhias* were hanging down their heads. They replied that they were hanging down their heads through shame at the name of one Salhes, and asked her to give them a trace as to his whereabouts. The old woman said, "I saw Salhes somewhere. He was drinking spirit at the still of a spirit-seller, and rolling *ganja* in his hands. He had a dark blue turban on his head, and a brown stick in his hand, and had besmeared his body with damp earth (like a gymnast)." Immediately all the *Banaudhias* ran to catch Salhes, and surrounded the distiller's still. Then they went up to him, and arrested him and tied his arms behind his back. Then Salhes began to ask the *Banaudhias*, "Tell me what fault have I committed that you have bound me." The *Banaudhias* replied: "Come to the *kachahari* (court), King Bhimsen will tell you the reason why. We do not know." Before and behind went the *Banaudhias*, in their midst went Salhes, till they got to the *kachahari*, where the former presented Salhes in the *kachahari* and with clasped hands all the *Banaudhias* exclaimed, and asked the king to take charge of the prisoner.

Then with hands clasped Salhes stood before the king, and said, "From birth have I been your slave, and never have I been branded even by a flower. Today what has happened that I am bound in chains?" Then king Bhimsen said, "In your presence, a theft has taken place in my palace; arrest the thief with his booty, then you will be released. Till then you will not be set free". Then said Salhes, "I am responsible for the guardianship of fourteen *kos* of Pakaria, but I have found no trace of the thief. Bring paper and I will write a bond for the value of the stolen property, and through all my future lives will I pay it off. I cannot find the thief and his booty." Then King Bhimsen was enraged at heart, and ordered his *Banaudhias*, thus "Take Salhes away from my presence and tie his hands behind his back. Lay nine *maunds* of trunk of a tree on top of him. Skin his back with a split length of green bamboo. A *Dusadh* by caste will never confess." Then into affliction fell Salhes, and he began to cry, "Now my life will not escape. I must die in the end. Fate cannot be wiped away. I have not seen my own brother Motiram. Nor have I seen my wedded wife. I have not even seen my old

mother." He began to think upon Asavari, the goddess of his family, saying "Go, and tell my wife, the faithful Dauna, with whom I have eloped, where she is sleeping on her bed in the garden. Tell her to come to the *kachahari* to see me."

When Dauna Malin heard the news, she arose and gazed round in horror. She stood in the way, and smoothed a cubit and a quarter of the ground with cowdung and having called upon all the gods and saints, asked for a sign from the sun. "O sun, tell me a true sign, that I may know in what kingdom the thief dwells. Whose son is he, and whose nephew, what is his name? Tell me all this." (The sun told her) and when she heard the sign, she arose and went into the midst of the garden. She adorned herself in all the sixteen graces, and made a magic flower basket. She began to pluck flowers, and plucked them of varied hues. She plucked fresh cloves and cardamoms. She then went to look for her lord, and entered into the midst of the *kachahari*. With clasped hands, she said humbly to King Bhimsen, "Very tender is my lord Salhes. He cannot bear a beating, unloose his bonds for a time, and I will bring the thief and his booty from wherever he may be." Then in a rage the Prime Minister said, "Whence can a woman bring a thief and his booty? Until you bring them, I will not release him." Then said King Bhimsen, "I will have him released, but write a bond in my favour— 'I will bring the thief and his booty on the eighth day from this. If I do not bring him within that time, then, O King, I will marry you.', "Write a bond to that effect." And so he made her do. Then Dauna Malin said, "Within seven days will I bring the thief and booty." And so each party ratified the bond.

Then up rose Malin, and unloosed her lord's bonds with her own hands and they went away one behind the other. Then Salhes asked Malin how she had got his bonds unloosed and she said, "I gave my chastity in bond that Salhes would bring the thief within eight days. Thus I got you unloosed." Then Salhes asked her who the thief was, and she told him it was Chuhar Mal, who lived in Mokama, the nephew of Jagat, who had committed the theft. "Act like a man, Salhes, that you may arrest the thief with his booty. He can be caught by no ordinary means; I tell you an artifice. Go you to quarter of the *nats* (daveen) and borrow all their goods and chattels, a drum, a club, a hoe, a *jhilam*, a bed, a chair, a tent, and buffaloes." Salhes then went and borrowed all those things, and made them over to Malin. Then said Malin, "All these further stratagems I tell you. Shave off the pig-tail from your head, and let your hair be short. Wear a tight silk waist cloth; put on your head a fine coloured cap; smear your body with moist earth, and exercise (stretching exercise) three or four times, that you may appear a true *nat*."

Then Dauna Malin apparelled herself in garments of the south, arranged her hair flat over each temple, applied collyrium to her eyelids, and between each of her teeth she inserted black dye. She put on a tight-fitting

bodice, and an armlet on her arm, and anklets around her feet, and on her forehead silver spots like the moon surrounded by stars; and thus she made herself appear a real dancer. The two then began to sing the song of *Alla* and *Rudal* (after the manner of *nats*). Hearing the cry of *Alla*, all the people of the Morang came and surrounded them, and began to see the show; and behold, those whom they knew were unrecognized by them. Then the two lowered their tent, and went to catch the thief, and arrived at the Ganges bank. In the meantime the Ganges heard of the advent of Salhes, and all along its banks it sank the boats, and taking its proper form of a Brahman woman mounted its highest bank. They reached the bank of the river, and asked her to show them where they could find a boat, that they might cross the river. Then the Ganges said, "All the boats have been borne away by the stream; return you, then, to your own house." "We will not return, but will cross the river as if it was dry land." She took off her necklace, and laid it upon the water, and the *nat* and the *natin* mounted on it; away floated the necklace, and upon it the *nat* and *natin* crossed the river into Magadh. From Magadh they hastened to Munger, and travelling the whole night arrived at Balawe, and selecting a grove in the village of Mokama they fixed upon it for their lodging, and hung all their property, and pitched their tent.

Then Salhes rested himself down, and the *natin* putting a bundle of beads on her head went to sell them in the bazar. "Buy, O mistress, buy beads," cried she. Then selling beads she arrived at Chuhar's outer gate. He was sleeping the sleep of seven sleepers within his seven houses, and Malin herself stood at the door, and by her magic awoke him. He woke with a start, and gazed around in wonder, and opening the doors of the seven houses, he came outside asking Malin why she had come to his house. "I am by caste a *natin*, I have come to your house for two or three pice." Then said Chuhar Mal: "In my house there is no mother, nor sister, nor wife. How therefore can you expect any present from me?" The *natin* replied, "Last night I saw in a dream in my tent that in your house there is a necklace. Give me that as a present, and I will fulfil all your heart's desires." Now when he saw her beauty, he went and brought the necklace, saying, "I stole this from Fort Keola, from the palace of King Bhimsen, and from the beat of Salhes. This necklace I give you for a gift." She replied, "Come to my tent, and upon that golden bed of yours will I fulfil your heart's desires." Front with the golden bed upon his head went Chuhar, and behind him the *natin*, to her tent.

In the meantime Salhes had left, and went to call brother Moti Ram and his nephew Kari Kant, and taking with him seven hundred male elephants with small tusks, surrounded the tent with them. While he was doing this the *natin* spread the bed, and making Chuhar Mal to lie upon it, applied sweet oil on his body. By this time morning dawned, and Salhes arrived with all his



army, and surrounded the tent in which Chuhar Mal was sleeping. His goddess Asavari awoke him, saying "For the sake of a woman, your enemy Salhes has come." On this he arose and looked around and around, and tying his sleeping cloth (wrapper) around his waist, stood up. In his hand he took a knife. He gave one jump, and flew into the air to a height of fifty or a hundred cubits. He fell outside the cricle of elephants, and began to fight with Salhes. He leaped even as a wolf does into a flock of goats. Wherever he jumped there, he slashed an elephant. He cut down at once the seven hundred male elephants with small tusks. For three days and nights the fight lasted, and then he pursued the three brethren in fallow field. Up rose the Malin, and caught the arm of Chuhar Mal. "I am by profession a dancer, and many are the travellers who come to me. If you fight with them, my earnings will all diminish. Cease your anger; come to the tent, and I will fulfil your heart's desires." Chuhar Mal then returned to the tent and lay upon the bed and slept. She put him under the influence of Ahidra, the goddess of sleep, and called to King Salhes, and Motiram, "Come and bind your foe."

When they heard this they came and tied the thief and his booty to the bed, and within seven days, the *nat* and the *natin* hastened to the banks of the Ganges with him. In the Ganges the seven hundred elephants returned to life, and by magic the *natin* (and her husband) crossed the river, and travelling by night arrived in the day time at King Bhimsen's *kachahari* and made over to him the thief with his booty. When he saw the thief, the king could not restrain his surprise. When they unloosed Chuhar Mal, he told the whole story: how he had indeed committed the theft, hearing of Salhes's reputation, and from Salhes's beat. When King Bhimsen heard this, he was pleased at heart and gave Salhes a complete suit of five clothes, five weapons, and his own special mare and allowed him to depart. Thereafter, with Dauna Malin, Salhes remained in the garden of King Bhimsen and guarded it for the rest of his life.

*Gīt Salhesak*, 16th century

*Tr.* by George A. Grierson

## Songs on Love

### KAMSANARAYANA

KAMSANARAYANA (Kamsānārāyaṇa, 16th century) a panegyric name of Lakshminatha, was the last ruler of the Oinivara dynasty. He was a tributary of Nasrata Shaha (1512-1531) of Bengal. So he can be placed in the early sixteenth century. Nine of his songs are extant. Of these, five bear the name Kamsanarayan, and four Lakshminatha, i.e., Lakshminatha, in their *bhanitas*. It can be assumed that the songs carrying the name Lakshminatha were composed before he succeeded his father as the ruler of Mithila.

1

O my love, I fall at your feet. Whatever my mistakes  
Do not stop loving me, for life and youth are short lived.  
Come back, O gifted lover mine, who can recognize merit.  
Punish me, if you like.  
It seems I won't get an answer, if I asked.  
What has caught your fancy? Why is the love-god so cunning?  
Your heart is hard as wood, devoid of pity.  
Kamsanarayana sings, a heartless person has no affection.

*Kamsanarayana Tirhuti*, 16th century

Tr. by Umanath Jha

I holding the hands of her companions,  
She looks out of the door at the road, and weeps.  
Nobody says when Krishna will leave Mathura and return.  
Who will carry my message? Who can persuade your  
Hard-hearted lover?  
The dear one has forgotten his love; I am dying.  
How much suffering can I bear?  
The evil rainy season will come with dark clouds,  
With the love-god in front.  
King Kamsa says: Have patience,  
Your hope will be fulfilled.

*Kamsanarayanak Tirhuti*, 16th century

Tr. by Umanath Jha

## Fourteen Poems

GOVINDADAS JHA

GOVINDADAS JHA (Govindadās Jhā, c. 1570-1640) is among the three great writers of medieval Maithili literature, the others being Jyotirishvar (c. 1260-1340) and Vidyapati (c. 1340-1448). His identity has been confused with several others like Govinda, Govindadas Kaviraja or Govindadas in Mithila and Bengal. But it has now been confirmed that he was a resident of village Raiyam in district Madhubani and his younger brothers were Haridas Jha and Ramdas Jha. Ramdas wrote the Kirtaniya play *Anandavijaya* under the patronage of King Sundar Thakur (1623-68), and in the introduction to it he has described Govindadas as an eminent scholar of Nyaya. It seems that Govindadas went to complete his education at Navdwip in Bengal and became a Vaishnava. His poems reveal his acute knowledge of Nyaya and devout Vaishnavism. Govindadas' poems on Krishna

are the only pieces in Maithili revealing Vaishnavism of the Chaitanya school. His poems are marked by consummate artistry and exquisite poetry, along with a profound poetic insight. There are nearly 300 poems to his credit. Frequently his sophisticated style has been contrasted with Vidyapati's simpler and more straightforward one, though both had an equally learned background.

Fourteen of his poems are given below:

1

### Homage to Jayadeva

Jayadeva, the paragon of poets,  
Is the divine wish-fulfilling tree,  
In the shade of whose verdant foliage of songs,  
My heart, tormented with the heat of worldly existence.  
Derives a rare soothing cool, and yearns  
To submerge itself into it more and more!  
Glory to Jayadeva, blessed with Padmavati's boundless love,  
The master supreme among poets inspired to captivate in word and rhyme  
The divine dalliance of Krishna with Radha!  
But low and mean as I am,  
I find no means by which to receive and express  
The glory and grandeur inherent in Hari's love and life.  
But for the shower of grace divine,  
The task is all beyond me.  
So, with abject surrender at your feet,  
With a leaf of grass held between my teeth,  
I, Govindadas, the petty poet, beg you, O Radha, O Krishna, to inspire me.  
And make my ardent desire and dream come true.

2

### Juxtaposition

Krishna looks like new clouds dark!  
Radha is lightning's constant spark.  
He is like sapphire all resplendent!  
Like gold, purified tenfold, she is radiant.  
Radha and Madhava together display:  
The goddess and god of love in eternal play.  
He just a tree of *tamal*, quite young:  
She a sweet golden bud of mango tree, newly sprung.

She like a new lotus in her beauty:  
 He like an ever-drunk black bee.  
 Her face appears as the moon effulgent;  
 His eyes like those of *chakore* indulgent.

The sight of the morning moon by the side of the rosy dawn  
 Leaves Govindadas spell-bound.

३

### The Dalliance Divine

Like a sapphire set in the midst of gold,  
 Krishna looked, placed in the midst of ladies  
 The chief of dancers, he was gyrating circle within circle,  
 Like a big piece of sapphire scintillating.  
 O! it was a wonder of wonders, an unprecedented divine dalliance,  
 The stationary lightning in the clouds  
 Was pouring incessant shower ambrosial:  
 Lots of moons on lots of dark patches  
 And lots of dark patches on lots of moons;  
 Sometimes the ladies are visible, sometimes Krishna,  
 As they all move and move.  
 As if the creepers of gold and the green *tamal* trees,  
 Each the body of each embrace,  
 As if the black bees through humming accompany  
 The sweet shrill melodies of the maidens,  
 And sometimes the maidens sing, accompanying in tune  
 The drunk black bees; they all put Govindadas in trance.

४

### Krishna, the Goldsmith

Whenever Krishna blows his flute  
 He kindles and re-kindles the fire of passion in me,  
 Consuming all my inhibitions of family traditions,  
 Using the pleasures of touch in the embrace of both hands, as borax  
 And the shower of sweat as the cooling agent,  
 He, like a subtle goldsmith  
 Sets the precious gem of his love  
 Onto the purified gold of my heart,

And lo! makes a pendant to bedeck me with,  
 Further, he enamels it with the flush of his romance  
 So that it becomes something uniquely invaluable  
 I conceal it within myself, away from the ever-watchful eyes of my guardians.  
 Those, however, who are sensuous, shrewd, and have a craving for love  
 Are easily aroused to make it the end of their life to grab it.  
 Govindadas requests the lady to abstain from unfolding the secret to others  
 For it would be a mistake to do so.

## 5

## Love's Miseries

Krishna has stolen into the sanctum sanctorum of my heart,  
 O sentinel of Love, be on your guard !  
 Keep the respect for my superiors away from me  
 Like thieves, out to steal the precious possession enshrined in my heart  
 O friend, after a long time I have understood things,  
 Gone are all confusion and dilemma hence,  
 My love for Krishna, like a serpent,  
 Has swallowed up the loathsome toads of inhibitions;  
 So supreme is love's sway  
 That consciousness of my own self I have lost.  
 While intending to do one thing, I do quite another;  
 My heart is full of love but it is for an outsider,  
 The lord of my house has become a co-wife to me,  
 And woe me to sleep that has for ever left my eyes.  
 I cannot tell anybody all these miseries  
 Govindadas also is a witness to them.

## 6

## Love's True Limits

Ever since I saw Krishna  
 With just a part of the corner of my eyes,  
 So ridden with the love-god's arrows I have been  
 That I gasp for life!  
 O friend! how unfavourable is Heaven to me.  
 So my tributes go to one  
 Who could cast both her eyes on Hari!  
 And now comes the "fair-eyed lady" telling me  
 Krishna is dark as a cloud to see,

But lo! to me he is all lightning, all flash!  
 Blessed is the "love-sweet" lady  
 Who, at the magic touch of Hari,  
 Is just floating on the waves of bliss  
 Whereas in such a situation my heart is only consumed in fire!  
 If I am called a "sweet-heart" I shall have to offer my life and all  
 To attain love's perfect level,  
 Govindadas says:  
 The supreme glory of love is revealed  
 To that lovable lady alone  
 Who knows the true limits of love.

## 7

## Pangs of the Heart

What a pensive look you cast on the *kadamba* tree in full bloom  
 With your head helplessly fallen on your palm.  
 Every now and then you are stretching your body undulating,  
 Your hair are made to stand on their end again and again like a plant laden  
 with buds!  
 What a sight!  
 O sweet lady, beguile me no more,  
 I know it for certain now,  
 You have had a tryst with Krishna verily!  
 Why conceal you your heart's intimations,  
 That get revealed, the more they are concealed.  
 For, face but mirrors what rages in the heart.  
 Vainly you struggle to check your tears,  
 Any your word, choked by joy, is but half articulate.  
 Irrespective of where your body is lying, your eyes are ever rivetted  
 'Towards the road by which he is to come.  
 In solitary hours you keep restlessly moving to and fro;  
 Govindadas pronounces:  
 All sense of shame and propriety of conduct  
 Suddenly vanishes when a lady is in love's crisis.

## 8

## The Maiden's Effulgence

Wherever her body light emanates  
 There the air with lightning scintillates.

Wherever her ruddy feet are led,  
 A host of *thalakamal*<sup>1</sup> petals appear;  
 See, O friend, this lady who is in my company  
 That plays with my life, what a tyranny!  
 Wherever her sportive brow in motion curves  
 The *kalindi*, as it were, leaps in archlike waves.  
 No sooner her liquid glance turns any side  
 Than bowers of blue lotuses are there formed.  
 Whichever way she throws her sweet smile,  
 Blossoms of *kunda*<sup>2</sup> shoot forth milk-white.  
 Govindadas says, only Radha knows and none other  
 How supremely enamoured is Krishna of her !

## 9

## All Blossom-Formed

O fair-complexioned lady!  
 Why do you cull blossoms from the garden,  
 When your body itself is formed with blossoms!  
 Isn't your face as bright as the golden lotus,  
 Especially when Krishna, the black-bee, charmed with your odour,  
 Is all the time around you?  
 Verily, your eyes two blue lotuses par excellence make.  
 Beautified all the more  
 By stretching them up to your ears' end:  
 On your well-formed pleasant nose  
 Reigns the exquisite *til* flower, which in fragrance  
 Belittles the very Tree of Heaven.  
 As for your lips lit up with sweet smile,  
 They are nothing but *bandhuka* blossoms blithe!  
 And your teeth, well, they are the buds of *kunda* flower  
 Shedding lustre pure white!  
 Your body entire gleaming like golden *champak*,  
 Your palms excel even *thalakamal* flower in full bloom!  
 Govindadas infers  
 The lady should offer her body itself  
 To Lord Pashupati<sup>3</sup> in worship.

1. A kind of red lotus flower on the land.

2. A white flower.

3. A pun, meaning both—Krishna, the cowherd boy and Shiva, the Lord of animals.

10

Rehearsal

The lady is rehearsing as to  
 How she would have her love's rendezvous  
 With you, O Krishna:  
 Under her flower-soft feet, sowing thorns  
 Along the pathway, then pouring  
 Pitcherfuls of water all over it and muffling  
 Her anklets with her garment,  
 She practises walking  
 Carefully planting her toes on the ground!  
 In a bid to get the habit  
 Of going a long way in the pitch-dark night of the rainy season  
 Steals out of her home, suddenly,  
 At the dead of night, and along she treads,  
 Eyes blindfolded by her hands two,  
 Then, to prepare herself for an encounter  
 With a serpent, out in the dark,  
 She just wraps her bracelets with something  
 Coiled hard in the serpent's way!  
 Addressed by superiors,  
 She hears one thing and answers quite another  
 Like one deaf!  
 Her response to kinsmen's queries  
 Is just a smile, as if in a trance!  
 Govindadas avers:  
 She does all these while she is rehearsing to meet Madhava!

11

Derring-do

The lady who would start  
 At the sight of a snake painted on the wall  
 Now in the darkness conceals herself  
 By covering with her hand the jewel on the head of the serpent:  
 O Madhava, how shall I tell you of her ardent love for you?  
 Having lost all control over herself while pining for you,  
 The young maiden is still alive, only by good luck!  
 Or else, how could she, who felt her feet bruised  
 Even by stepping on *thalakamala* a soft,



Go and come back boldly as she does now  
 On the thorny path, full of hurdles!  
 She who did not think of leaving her home even in the evening,  
 And to whom her own doorway seemed but miles away,  
 Now ventures out all alone in the pitch-dark night!  
 Govindadas has only this to observe!

## 12

## Akrur, Not Cruel Only in Name

He has come to Braja, Kamsa's emissary Akrur,  
 "Not cruel" only in name, really one  
 Whose cruelty has parallel none,  
 For, his mission to take Krishna to Kamsa,  
 To Mathura, is most sinister!  
 And this announcement, most offensive to the ears,  
 He is making from door to door.  
 The whole night have I kept weeping and besmearing my face:  
 Let us solicit the help of an enchantress great  
 To transfix the moon and the stars  
 And keep them shining in the sky  
 And never allow any room for the coming of the morn,  
 So that our Krishna ever abides at home.  
 We'll ask for her boon to keep Krishna tied to herself,  
 In case all these fail,  
 We would do all to pacify evil omens  
 And make Krishna come back quickly (from Mathura).  
 Govindadas avers this.

## 13

## Pitiless Krishna

Her moonlike face is now lain on her palm,  
 Eternally transfixed;  
 Day and night tears keep streaming down;  
 Dishevelled hair, ravished by deep sighs,  
 She melts in pain like the waning moon;  
 Emaciated and weak, her life itself is ebbing out:  
 O Hari, won't you even now relent, before it's too late?  
 When her companions lay her  
 On the bed made of lotus-petals all,

They all turned ashen-grey by the heat of her pining body;  
The cool touch of sandal-paste only makes her startle!  
And the soft beams of moonlight  
Make her swoon and fall down on the floor!  
Govindadas exhorts:

O pitiless Krishna, hurry you please  
To Gokula at once!

14

### The Ardours of Love

Wherever the rosy lotus feet of my lord may go,  
Let the earth be made from my body!  
In the mirror where my lord desires to see his face,  
Let the light of my body be it!  
In whichever lake my lord daily bathes,  
Let the water of my body be it!  
In whatever air my lord likes to fan himself,  
Let the air in my body be it!  
In whatever sky my lord roams,  
Let the sky in my body be it!

Govindadas says: O lady, as fair as gold,  
Can that Emerald (Krishna) exist without you?

*Krishnalila*, 16th-17th century

Tr. by Jagadish Prasad Karna

### Bashful Young Love

CHATURBHUJ

CHATURBHUJ (c. 1589-1604) belonged to the royal family and was in many ways a unique successor of Vidyapati. His poems are superior to the common followings of Vidyapati. The following poem is cast in the mould of an allegory explaining the desire for communion of the soul with God.

*Refrain*, Ah Madhab . . .

The forms of both are young, and so is their passion.  
The young recognition of love is waking.

Neither of the young ones speaketh,  
For both have pride in their minds.

Daily the bodies of both are wasting away.  
 Who knoweth how many days must (thus) be passed.  
 Both minds dwell on one employment,  
 But modesty stands between them.

The more she concealth her love within her heart,  
 The more will it become manifested by her eyes.

Saith the skilful Chaturbhuj  
 Their love never groweth old.

*Chaturbhujak Tirhuti*, 16th-17th century

Tr. by George A. Grierson

## Selections

### UMAPATI

UMAPATI (Umāpati, 16th-17th century) was originally known as Umanath and was a resident of village Koilakh in Madhubani district. Earlier he was not properly identified as he eulogizes in the play both the ruler of Mithila as well as Hindupati Hariharadeva. The latter was a Sen chieftain in the Nepalese kingdom at Mekamani in Saptari district. He had seven wives, four of whom are mentioned in the songs of the play.

### 1

### The Abduction of the Parijata

*The Abduction of the Parijata* (Pārijātaharana, 17th century) is an early *kirtaniya* drama by a learned poet who is regarded as one of the best followers of the Vidyapati tradition. It is remarkable to note how it illustrates the presence of Sanskrit as an additional ornamentation in the play while the vernacular is the main vehicle of expression so that the poet may be intelligible to the lowest classes in the audience. Indeed the play was taken as model of the *kirtaniya* drama, bereft generally of Sanskrit in later years. Its characters became the stock characters of the *kirtaniya* repertory, and it gave perhaps the name of *kirtaniya* in view of its emphasis on the praise of Krishna as the theme of the play, which obviously is based on an episode in *Harivamshapurana*.

The following passage is taken from the beginning of the play. There are no divisions into Acts. It describes the situation of the mythological story briefly. Krishna, the hero, had two wives: Rukmini and Satyabhama. Rukmini is the senior and the mother of the heir-apparent Pradyumna, while Satyabhama is the favourite. In the garden of Indra, the chief of the gods, there was a wonderful tree called Parijata. Narada, the minstrel and messenger of the gods, pays a visit to Krishna at

Dwaraka and finds him in the company of Rukmini. He presents him with a flower of this tree, which Krishna gives to Rukmini. Satyabhama, happening to see this, is filled with jealousy and refuses to make peace with Krishna unless he brings to her not only a single flower but the entire Parijata tree. Krishna asks Indra for it, but his request is refused. Krishna, along with Arjuna, then attacks Indra, takes away the Parijata tree from heaven and presents it to Satyabhama, who plants it in her courtyard. Narada then so manipulates that Krishna and Arjuna become his slaves and he puts them on sale. The ladies purchase back their husbands from Narada. Thus the play ends with joy for all concerned.

Scene--The Raivata Grove, near Krishna's palace

*(Song Speech from behind the scenes)*

*Song introducing Krishna (Malava Melody)*

Vile Kamsa's line he overthrew,  
 He slew the Keshi-horde  
 The throne his graceless son had seized  
 To Ugrasena restored  
 The care-worn Yadavas, sore oppressed,  
 He freed from care and rue  
 But nonetheless, he incarnate God  
 Hath yet more work to do  
 He must relieve the burden'd earth  
 From sins' appalling load;  
 The Pandavas, too, must be straightaway placed  
 Upon salvation's road  
 And virtue's law he surely must  
 On sinful earth impose,  
 And silence, 'mid the harassed saints,  
 The litany of woes.  
 And openly, that all may learn  
 In meekness to abide,  
 He must the haughty king of gods  
 Abase in all his pride  
 And love and faith in the Supreme  
 He must establish meet  
 That all may due salvation find,  
 And reach the heavenly seat  
 That he, rejoicing with his Queen,  
 The jewelled crest of kings,  
 Great Hindupati discerns true love  
 The wise Umapati sings.

*Enter Krishna accompanied by Rukmini and her companion Mitrasena.*  
*Krishna (aside)*

*Verses (Sanskrit)*

To lift the load from th' earth, and cut off sin;  
 To teach pure souls, by practice, to regain  
 The hidden meaning of the holy Veda;  
 To rescue virtue from unrighteous thrall;  
 To crush the pride of men of evil heart  
 The enemies of Brahmanas and gods;  
 To break the overweening arrogance  
 Of such as Brahma, Indra and the like;  
 These are the tasks I set myself to do,  
 When I become incarnate in this world.  
 (Aloud) Lady, behold the beauty of the spring in this Raivata grove!  
 (He sings)

*Spring Song*

Countless *dhaka* in crimson glory  
 Golden *champaks*, *bakuls* rare,  
*Bakuls* in wild luxuriance  
 Blossom in the vernal air  
 Scattered o'er the dusky distance  
 Clusters of the trumpet vine,

Graceful jasmines, snowy *madhavis*,  
 With sweet *malatis* entwine.  
 With her hands in homage folded,  
 Rukmini, beside her king,  
 Wanders through the woodland mazes,  
 Gazing on the charms of spring.

Winter's raptures now are ended;  
 New-born transports have they found;  
 Spring's delights rejoice the lovers,  
 Treading on enchanted ground.

Glowing shine the dense hibiscus  
 Minjal, mango wide outspread,

Em' rald leaflets early flashing,  
Drunk with nectar, ruby-red.

Now the cuckoo-folk are calling,  
All impassioned by the sound,  
As the murmured sighs of dalliance  
Echo in the groves around.

'Tis as though with frenzied paeans  
Welcomed they love back again,  
O'er the three-fold world triumphant,  
King victorious to reign.

Black bees, bebies buzzing busy  
Gyrate madly in the shade,  
Drunk with honey, mazed with nectar  
Culled from flowers of the glade.

'Tis of love they, too, are singing  
Praises of the heaven-born,  
He, who takes the proudest maiden,  
Conquer her, and breaks her scorn.

Malaya sends fragrant breezes,  
Sandal-scented o'er the vale.  
Fragrant, too, the spotless lotus,  
Fragrant flower, fragrant gale.

Two-fold glamour that unfolds them,  
The sweet springtide's winning smile,  
Raivat's fragrance, both conspiring  
Hearts of gods, or saints to wile.

Lo, the miracle of Krishna,  
Multiplied in earthly mould.  
Sixteen thousand maids, disporting,  
Krishna in their arms enfold.

Wise Umapati, the teacher—  
Singer, too, and suppliant,  
Prays to the monarch of all monarchs  
Blessings on us all to grant.

Krishna (*speaking*): Sit down, dear. (*They take their seats, they gaze into the air with surprise*) Wonderful!

*(He sings)*

*Song sung by Krishna, introducing Narada*

Behold, there comes a portent to the earth;  
 With glorious light the air is all aflame,  
 'Tis not the sun that falls from the sky,  
 Nor fire descending offerings to claim.

In garments white, and clear upon his brow  
 The sacred caste mark, on his breast the thread,  
 There comes a Brahman, splendidly sublime,  
 In all the vigour of his lineage dread.

His lute gives added beauty to his hands  
 His hands the holy Vedas also bear.  
 Narada comes, the hymner of the gods,  
 Homage to pay, and rev'rence to declare.

Most worthy and most wise is Narada  
 Filled, for the world, with sympathy sincere;  
 The mind-born son to mighty Brahma born  
 Of my lov'd Shiva the companion dear.

The wise Umapati, of kindly heart,  
 Does these true sayings faithfully rehearse,  
 And Hindupati, the husband of  
 Jagmata Devi, knows.

*(Enter Narada in joyful mood)*

*Verses (Sanskrit)*

NARADA: That which nor Brahma nor Mahesh have seen,  
 Nor rapt ascetics e'en in visions rare,  
 The lotus-feet of Krishna, cowherds' God  
 That shall I see with mine own eyes today.

*(He sings)*

*Song: Asavari Melody*

To Hari's court today I haste  
 And soon my eyes true joys will taste (*Refrain*).

He whom rapt ascetics know not,  
 With mine own eyes I shall see,  
 He whom Shiva and Brahma worship  
 To whom else bend I the knees?

He will grant a boon most precious,  
 Faiths and love within my breast,  
 In the hour of death assuring  
 At his feet eternal rest.  
 Hindupati, the king, rejoicing  
 With Maheshwari, his queen,  
 In his heart hath comprehended  
 How to see the great Unseen.

Says Umapati, the poet,  
 To the' Eternal, the Adored,  
 God, All-pow' rful, self-existent  
 From pure souls be praise outpoured.

*(He walks round the stage). Here is Satyabhama's companion Sumukhi.  
 (Enter Sumukhi)*

SUMUKHI: My Lady Satyabhama has sent me to enquire whether His Highness would like to see her in private. If so, she will come. *(Addressing Narada)*.  
 See, I see you are a Brahman. My reverence to you! May I ask if you are Narada or monkey?

NARADA: My blessings be on your heart's desires. But you suggest that I am a monkey. Your language runs along more than one path.

SUMUKHI *(timidly)*: O dear! This is most surprising. Then you are the head monkey of heaven.

NARADA: Now you are colleague to the monkey of heaven! Every time you open your mouth, you must say something with a double meaning. Tell me, where is Lord Krishna?

SUMUKHI: He is closeby.

*(Enter Dharmadasa, the gate-keeper)*

DHARMADASA: Lord Krishna tells me to go and see if Satyabhama is coming.

NARADA: Porter! Tell Lord Krishna that I, Narada, am here.

DHARMADASA: *(To Krishna)* Your Majesty, Narada is waiting at the door.

KRISHNA: Show him in at once. What, kept Narada standing at the door?

DHARMADASA: Your Holiness, be good enough to draw near to His Majesty.

*(Exit Narada, approaches Krishna. Krishna, bowing with Rukmini, does reverence to him and offers him a seat)*



NARADA: May your dynasty prosper!

KRISHNA: Your Holiness, you have been travelling over all the three worlds.  
Pray, tell me what wonderful things have you seen, and where you saw them?

NARADA: What can be more wonderful than Your Majesty's own exploits?

KRISHNA: There is a most delicious scent coming from somewhere. Have you brought me anything as a present?

*Verses (Sanskrit)*

NARADA: What can I give to One, within whose breast  
Sits Lakshmi's self, the giver of all good?  
What words of praise will not be trite to you,  
When on Your lips dwells heaven-born eloquence?  
When Shiva, Brahma, and the other Gods  
Attend as henchmen at Your beck and call,  
What service is there left for other hands  
To render unto an Incarnate God?

*(He sings)*

*(Song: Asavari Melody)*

'Tis You that dwell in the heart  
Guiding, restraining, Master wise  
Why take You this humble part,  
Thus hidden in a human guise?

Indra in his high abode  
Has on me a flow'r bestowed  
Priceless it is, culled for me  
From the Parijata tree.  
If I lay it at Your feet  
Offering it in worship meet,  
Then I've gained a double grace.  
Paid my devoirs, seen Your face  
Fair am I, at least, to sip  
Water from devotee's cup  
As I drink, from sin set free,  
Nectar does it seem to me.

God! The careworn do You bless,  
Father of the fatherless.  
Endless services we owe  
Merely gratitude to show.

Wise Umapati does say,  
In devotion ever pray,  
To th' Eternal, the Adored,  
From pure soul be love outpoured.

Hindupati, on his part  
Comprehends in his heart,  
With Maheshwari, his Queen,  
How to see the Great unseen.

*(Having finished his song, he offers the flower. Krishna accepts it and regards it with veneration. All gaze upon it with wonder)*

*(Song from behind the scene)*  
*Song introducing Satyabhama: Pancham Melody*

Comes the Lady, Satyabhama,  
Royal in her mien and gait,  
Witching in the sweet demeanour  
Of her conjugal estate.

Satyabhama, happy-hearted,  
Haughty, too, as Krishna's wife;  
For she knows she is his darling,  
Precious to him as his life.

Doubtful are we when we see her:  
Has a moon-gleam taken birth?  
Has a flash of heav'n sent lightning  
Come to dwell upon the earth?

Or, when we her members shapely  
Decked with jewels rare behold,  
Can she be a dainty creeper,  
Blossoming with flow'rs of gold?  
Here Umapati, the poet,  
Of his knowledge speaketh sooth,  
Hindupati, mighty monarch,  
With his Queen, discreet truth.

*(Enter Satyabhama and her companion Sumukhi)*

SATYABHAMA: Sumukhi, dear, would His Majesty really like to see me ?  
SUMUKHI: Could I speak anything but the truth before your Ladyship?

*(Satyabhama sings)*

*Song: Pancham Melody*

Haste, my friend, in joy and gladness  
Come into the garden sweet :  
There my love-god Murari,  
Hero, lover, I would meet.  
As the sun, the day time's jewel,  
Glow on Meru's topmost height,  
So shine forth the lustrous jewels  
Studding his tiara bright.

See his joyous face, enlightened  
By the radiance of his eyes  
'Tis as though the moon has risen,  
With two lilies for her prize.

See the woodpine garland hanging  
White athwart his noble breast,  
Precious stones and yellow garments  
On his dark form flashing proud,  
Flicker like the summer lightning  
Dancing on a newborn cloud.

Ah, my Deity entrancing !  
Life and wealth, my soul, my all !  
These I bring, and meekly lay them  
At Your feet, your humble thrall.

Wise Umapati, the poet  
Does himself the truth rehearse  
And Hindupati, the husband of  
Jagmata Devi, knows.

Dear Sumukhi, there is a most delightful scent today in the garden. I'll  
watch from under this jasmine tree what His Highness is doing in my  
absence.

KRISHNA: Narada, what is the peculiar virtue of this flower ?

NARADA : *Verses (Sanskrit)*

Whatever form, or scent, or flavour new,  
Whatever feeling, known or unexplored,

A man may wish, if he but asks for it,  
This wond'rous flower instantly bestows.

SATYABHAMA: Certainly the flower of the Parijata tree has most wonderful properties. Who else except the Elder Queen will get it?

KRISHNA: *(to Rukmini)* Lady, pray accept it.

Rukmini: *(Paying respects, and taking it)* : Great, indeed, is this favour that has been shown to me.

SATYABHAMA: It is quite right that it should be given to the mother of the eldest prince.

SUMUKHI: How is it right? But your Ladyship is standing out of sight.

RUKMINI: *(to her companion)* Mitrasena dear, you must make arrangement for a great festival.

MITRASENA: Dear Lady, I certainly will, provided your Ladyship will dance.

RUKMINI: It shall be as my dear companion wishes.

*(She dances accordingly and sings)*

*Song: Rajvijay Melody*

The seed of piety in former lives  
Today has ripened in a harvest rare,  
Hari, neglecting all his other wives  
Gives me alone the fruit beyond compare.

For, in my being of some former stage,  
Gauri I worshipped with my heart and will :  
Now, in reward, herself doth she engage  
Today my heart's desire to fulfil.

Over the heads of sixteen thousand queens  
My head is raised high by her decree,  
Says wise Umapati, salvation means  
Know Hindupati and fair Maheshwari.

SATYABHAMA: Sumukhi dear, there is nothing more to be heard. So come back, and let us go home.

SUMUKHI: But you couldn't do that without seeing His Highness first.

KRISHNA: I wonder how dear Satyabhama is passing the time?

SATYABHAMA: It seems that today I am to be content with only hearing myself called "dear". *(Approaching Krishna with a voice broken by sobs.)*  
Hail ! Hail ! *(At these words her utterance is choked. She pays reverence to Narada).*

NARADA: May you be highly honoured by your husband !

SATYABHAMA: That is what I hope for on this very day.

KRISHNA: Dearest, do sit down on this seat.

SATYABHAMA: (*her voice broken*) My Lord, I have got a headache, so I must go home.

*(Exit with her companion)*

RUKMINI: My Lord, is His Holiness to sanctify this place with his presence without having anything to eat?

KRISHNA: Quite so. (*Exit Rukmini with Narada and her companion.*)

KRISHNA: (*solus*) Satyabhama has quite put me into a fever by the state of mind that she has displayed.

### *Verses (Sanskrit)*

By her dark trouble darken'd is my breast,  
And from her trembling, sore it trembles too.  
Her silence melts it with eye-born tears,  
And by her sings again 'tis parched dry.  
Her faltering voice my heart has drowned deep,  
In a wide sea of passionate tenderness,  
Yet, by her absence, as I gaze distraught,  
Into a blazing fire she casts it.

Let me just follow her among the bushes of the grove. (*He walks about*)  
I see that she must have gone away altogether. Let me go to her  
apartments. (*Again walks about.*) Ah! here is the doorway to my darling's  
house. Here is Sumukhi busy in arranging cooling appliances. I'll ask her.  
Sumukhi, what is the news about my darling?

*(Enter Sumukhi)*

SUMUKHI: As for news, before this it was different; but now Fate has diminished all her tranquility.

KRISHNA: The language even of the associates of my darling is also ambiguous. Tell me the particulars.

*(Sumukhi Sings)*  
*Song: Nat Melody*

O Madhava, can I declare details  
Of her whose wrath refuses to assuage  
With flashing eye behold th' offended fair  
Consume her body in a fire of rage.

She gazes at the mirror in her ring,  
Sees her fair face at times, and wrathful cries,  
"Tis not a face, it is a moon of spring  
The lover's moon, the moon of lovers' lies."

Anon, forgetful, on her bosom round  
Her hand she lays, and cries with sudden strain,  
"Tis not my hand; a lotus have I found,  
Come to awake new love within my heart."

When her eyes fall upon her wealth of hair,  
With broken heart laments she aloud,  
"Not tresses these, to tell of my despair,  
I see before me heaven black with clouds."

Or happily, when she speaks, her voice so sweet  
Recalls to her the cuckoo's cry in spring  
O "Hari, Hari" and in this conceit  
She drops and swoons, her life abandoning,

O Madhav, e'en now on her show ruth,  
No husband kind is cruel to the end.  
That wise Umapati declares sooth  
His Queen Maheshwari Devi and Hindupati apprehend.

(*Speaking*) Shall I then inform Her Ladyship of your Lordship's arrival?

KRISHNA: (*in alarm*) Sumukhi, whatever Her Ladyship commands, I am ready to do (*Exit Sumukhi*). In the meantime, I'll peep through the window and look upon my beloved in her condition of wrath. (*He does so. He exhibits signs of agitation.*)

Ah ! Pity ! (*In perplexity*). She has been struck down by me !

### Verses (Sanskrit)

Upon her brow is tied a snowy band,  
Her stubborn will discard all ornament,  
Parch'd are her rosy lips with fainting sighs,  
All languid, sounds her erstwhile silv'ry voice,  
Cooling devices gathered round her tell  
Of the hot fever that consumes her frame.

(*Enter Satyabhama, as above described and Sumukhi fanning her*).

SUMUKHI: My lady, be consoled !

SATYABHAMA: What need is now for more cooling expedients ?

(*She sings*)

*Song : Kolav Melody*

Hari won my love and trust,  
 Cast me humbled in the dust,  
 'Neath a cloud I shelter sought,  
 Shone the sun with fine fraught.

When her eyes fall upon his wealth of hair,  
 With broken heart laments she aloud,  
 "Not tresses these to tell of my despair  
 I see before me heaven black with clouds."

Banish grieving from your soul;  
 We must bear what fate decrees.  
 Former births must take their toll,  
 Why thus seek death needlessly? (*Refrain*)

Has he early love forgot?  
 'Tis his nature. Blame him not.  
 Though you cherish it with care,  
 Does a snake remembrance bear?

Ne'er again your love display  
 Flouts it brings, lackaday!  
 A thousand times in nectar thrown,  
 Soft becomes not a stone.

Says the wise Umapati,  
 Soon will Hari come to you,  
 Hindupati, King of kings  
 And his Queen, the poet sings.

Enough of efforts! My life is too weak for them.  
 (*She sings again.*)

*Song: Vibhas Melody*

Let full moons in legions,  
 Giving all delight  
 In the Heav'nly regions  
 Shine by day and night!  
 Let full clouds rain water!  
 Let our hearts to please,  
 Blow from every quarter  
 Malay's gentle breeze!

Friend of mine, what gladness  
 Is left for me in life ?  
 My lord, in sorry madness,  
 Has flouted me, his wife.  
 O'er a world censorious  
 The insult they proclaim  
 Of the reproach inglorious  
 I cannot bear the shame. (*Refrain*)  
 Let the songs impassioned  
 Of the cuckoo and the bee,  
 In the form of fire fashioned,  
 Burn my ears ruthlessly.  
 Lo ! all urgents scented,  
 That cool a fevered frame,  
 Consume my form tormented  
 In incandescent flame.  
 Let Madana, ensnaring  
 God of love, contrive  
 To pierce my heart, contrive  
 With his arrows five.  
 Still, Friend of mine, what gladness  
 Is left for me in life ?  
 For Hari, in his madness,  
 Has flouted me, his wife.  
 Now, says Umapati, banish  
 Such rankling from your mind,  
 For all your wrath will vanish  
 When Hari once is kind.  
 Long live, in puissance glorious  
 ('Tis this the poet sings)  
 And with his Queen, victorious  
 Hindupati, King of Kings. (*She faints*)

KRISHNA: Ah ! The pity ! (*In perplexity*). She has been struck down by me.  
 Let me approach my darling. (*He goes up to her, signing her companion  
 to stand back, and gently strokes the soles of her feet.*)

SATYABHAMA: (*Partly regaining consciousness and addressing Sumukhi, who,  
 she imagines, is stroking her.*) The touch of your hands is not the same  
 as usual. (*She opens her eyes. Seeing Krishna, she veils her face and sits  
 up.*)

KRISHNA: (*Humbly folding his hands*) Darling, be appeased. Ah, disdainful  
 one ! (*He sings*)  
 (*Song in Maithili and verses in Sanskrit for the same meaning*)



*Song : Malav Melody*

In th' east the dawn is shining and the night has passed away,  
 The Moon has set, and chanticleer proclaims the opening day.  
 He loudly cries, "O lotuses, the lilies of the night  
 Have closed their petals; wake you, and open to the light."  
 Lady, e'en the myriad stars have vanished into space,  
 O, why unopened keep you yet the lotus of your face ?  
 Your face is a fair lotus, and your eyes twin lilies be  
 Your lips are made of roses and your nose of sesame.  
 While thus your form is compact of tender flow'rs alone,  
 O tell me why your heart is yet a heart of cruel stone.

*(Song in Maithili and in the same sense Sanskrit verse)*

So languid is your body that on your bosom fair,  
 Your body seems too heavy for the weight that you can't bear.  
 Too heavy are the bracelets that embrace your tender arms,  
 Too heavy is the garland that conceals your bosom's charms.  
 Yet—a strange contradiction—whilst you cannot these sustain,  
 You bear still a mountain of the cruellest disdain.

*Song*

Sweet, forbear from dwelling upon my great offence,  
 And in forgiveness smiling, accept my penitence !  
 Let the sunshine of your mercy clear the darkness of your pain,  
 Let the dawn tide marks the ending of a night-time of disdain.

Himalaya's fair daughter, great Parvati, benign,  
 Of you does wise Umapati proclaim the bow'r divine.  
 His heart, devoted truly, he lays at your feet,  
 And, trusting in your mercy, pours forth his verses sweet.

*Song*

Disdainful one ! For fault of mine  
 Altho' your heart be sore,  
 I crave, your pard'ning ear incline,  
 Nor cherish anger more.

Disdainful one! Your brow's a bow  
 Each glance a keen-tipped dart,

Aim them at me with care, that so  
They pierce my erring heart.

Disdainful one ! Your bosom round  
A mountain is complete  
Make me a prisoner, to it bound  
By your arm-fallen sweet.

Disdainful one ! Concede my suit,  
Show yourself kind to me.  
Give me your jewelled lotus feet  
My disdain to be.

The wise Umapati, speaks sooth,  
True love is rarely seen,  
With Hindupati knows the truth  
Maheshwari, his queen.

*(Satyabhama, paying reverence, and rising sings)*

*Song: Kedar Melody*

At that time and at that place,  
Why did you my name disgrace ?  
Now what solace have I ? None,  
O'er the world the news has run :  
Madhava, Ah Madhava !

Now each gossip has her chance !  
Laughs the world, and looks askance.  
'Mid my mates discredited,  
How can I uplift my head ?  
Madhava, Ah Madhava!

Those I laughed at yesterday  
Back to me derision pay;  
Fate to me has turned malign  
Dooming me to shame condign.  
Madhava, Ah Madhava !  
Wise Umapati declares  
Your goodman will need your cares  
Hindupati, the dread of foes,  
With his Queen, true rapture knows.  
Madhava, Ah Madhava ! *(She faints)*

KRISHNA (*raising her*): Darling ! be consoled.

SATYABHAMA (*reviving*) : Your Majesty, even your consolations put me to shame.

KRISHNA: Darling ! be appeased. Tell me plainly how I can calm your heart?

*Verses (Sanskrit)*

When the world suffers from some grievous scourge,  
With full compassion's gaze I give relief.  
So, now behold your prostate suppliant;  
On him one side-glance of compassion cast.  
No other conqueror I won, save you,  
Yet, when you're angered, all can conquer me.

*(Satyabhama petulantly sings)*

*Song: Maithili*

O Madhava, regard my case: to me  
Bring You and give the Parijata tree  
Now quickly sally forth this tree to get  
Or doubtless, else, my sun of life will set.  
Thus only can my repute be secured.  
And I from laughter and disgrace secured.

The wise Umapati, in poets' art,  
The truth declares from his kindly heart.  
King Hindupati and his consort Queen  
Of nuptial raptures all the joys have seen.

*Parijataharana*, c.16th-17th century

*Tr.* by George A. Grierson

**Appeasing the Beloved**

In the following hymn, God is allegorically shown as entreating the soul to abandon itself to Him.

O proud one, if you are angry at my fault,  
Be appeased, and show not wrath.  
Your brow is a bow, and your glances arrows,  
String your bow and strike me, O moon-faced one.

Consider your firm bosom as a great mountain,  
And bind me to it, Lady, with your arms for bonds.

With what act of submission will you be pleased ?  
Place your lotus feet upon my body  
(And they will be but) an ornament to me (and not a penance).

The wise Umapati saith a true saying.  
Hindupati knows the mother of the universe.

*Umapatik Tirhuti*, c.16th-17th century

Tr. by George A. Grierson

## The Marriage of Shiva and Parvati

JAGAJYOTIRMALLA

The medieval history of Nepal is a witness to the tremendous blossoming of literature, music, art, etc. during the rule of the Malla dynasty. The Malla kings accorded status and honour to Maithili equal to that of Sanskrit and as a result of that the valley of Nepal was reverberating with the touching songs of Maithili and became a centre of incessant source of creation in Maithili poetry and drama for centuries. JAGAJYOTIRMALLA was one of the illustrious kings at the capital of Bhaktapur. He was an emotional poet, artist and scholar-king, who ruled from 1613 to 1637. He was well versed in music, songs, drama, astrology, etc.

In Maithili literature he is chiefly remembered for his songs and drama. Many collections of his Maithili poems have come to light. He is credited with having written three dramas including *Har-Gauri Vivaha* (Hari-Gauri-Vivāha). He praises many gods and goddesses in his poems. But he offered his utmost devotion to Lord Shiva and His consort Parvati.

*Har-Gauri Vivaha* is a unique piece of writing in Maithili. It is a novel experiment in Maithili drama. It reflects the characteristic style of Maithili prose during the medieval period. Many verses devoted to Lord Shiva, some of them composed by other poets, are serially arranged by the writer in accordance with their respective relevance to the story of the marriage between Shiva and Parvati in this poetic drama. The play consists of nine *sambandhas* or divisions. The first *sambandha* starts with an Introduction, in which (the actress) and Sutradhar (the stage-manager) eulogise King Jagajyotirmalla.

In the second *sambandha*, Shiva, accompanied by Nandi-Bhringi, speaks about his own nature. He further speaks about the self-immolation of Sati (Parvati in her previous birth) and proposes to go to Himalaya to see Parvati.

In the third *sambandha* Shiva and Nandi-Bhringi reach the hermitage of Rishishwar. Rishishwar eulogises Shiva and then he alone proceeds to Himalaya

to see Parvati. In the fourth *sambandha*, Himalaya, his wife Maina and daughter Parvati all give their introductions, Himalaya and Maina are pleasantly amazed at Parvati's childhood actions. Shiva comes disguised as a hermit, and asks Maina about Parvati. Maina gives alms to Shiva, who refuses to take and goes away. In the fifth *sambandha*, Shiva, infatuated with Parvati, sends Rishishwar to Himalaya to ask for Parvati. In the sixth *sambandha* Rishishwar requests Himalaya's permission for Parvati to marry Shiva. But Maina, pointing out Shiva's demerits, rejects the proposal. Rishishwar makes Maina and Himalaya accept it. In the seventh *sambandha*, Rishishwar recites hymns in honour of Shiva. They all proceed towards Himalaya. In the eighth *sambandha*, Himalaya with his family is at the wedding altar. Parvati is decorated. Shiva is formally received. Marriage rituals follow. Shiva and Parvati leave. The parting of Parvati agonises Maina. The ninth *sambandha* begins with romantic details about Shiva and Parvati. They come to River Bagwati. Parvati is frustrated over Shiva's poverty and laments. Mahadev tries to convince her. Both dance and then play chess. Shiva loses the game and becomes sick. Parvati persuades him to cheer up. She becomes sick of Shiva's lack of interest. Shiva reveals His affection of Parvati.

## 1

(The following excerpt is from Act VIII (Eighth *sambandha*) of the play)

HIMALAYA: The auspicious moment for the marriage ceremony is so near,  
but Lord Shiva has not come yet.

MAINA: Oh, such is the groom you have selected ! (*To her female relatives*)  
You people now start decorating Parvati with natural cosmetics.

VIDYAKARI: (*A lady supposed to help in marriage rituals*) That is what I will  
do. (*Pointing to Parvati*) Come here, I will decorate you.

*The entry of Shiva on the stage is marked by music in Raga Asavari. The  
dialogue is in the Kona language.*

SHIVA: O Rishishwar, this place is indeed very pleasant.

RISHISHWAR: It is so due to the graces of Parvati. (*To Shiva*) O Lord, have a  
slow movement.

SHIVA: O Rishi, rightly said.

HIMALAYA: O dear, flowers are being showered from the sky and the  
reverberation of many Dunduvi instrument is being heard in heaven and  
all these, I guess, indicate that Shiva has arrived. So I shall go and receive  
Him.

*Himalaya goes there and takes Shiva to his house with all the honour  
due to a king.*

HIMALAYA: O Lord, it is my good fortune that you have graced my house.  
(*Then he honours Him in a royal manner*)

*A shameful Shiva takes his seat with his head down.*

HIMALAYA: O great Rishi, go with the Lord and be victorious on the wedding dais. (*Vasu, Rishi's disciple, bursts into laughter there on the dais.*)

HIMALAYA: The auspicious moment is so near do not make any delay.

RISHI: O Himalay, this is no time to delay.

HIMALAYA: O Rishishwar, all the materials to be used are there. Thereafter *Kankan-bandhan* (the tying of the mango leaf on a thread around the wrist of the groom) will take place.

RISHI: O Lord, first of all wash your feet.

SHIVA: Oh ! of course.

RISHI: O Himalaya, bring in the wooden appliance for pounding paddy, a yellow thread and a mango-leaf.

*Lyric is sung in Raga Maru Dhanashree*

Let there be victory to the Lord !

Nine persons, including the groom, perform the ritual of Othangar.

Let them be bound in a circle by the yellow thread.

As the first ring of *kankan* is tied

On the wrist of Shiva, the rishis smile,

When the second round is tied

All the eight persons encircled Him.

As the third ring was tied, all the persons felt pleased.

When the fourth ring was tied, the gods were showering flowers.

When the fifth round is completed,

The singers in heaven were singing.

When the sixth round is tied

The wives of the gods became gleeful.

As the seventh round is completed,

Everybody was joyfully amazed.

When, eventually, the final eighth round is tied

All the gods and the demons were filled with joy receiving the *sathik* rice and mango leaves.

Lord Shiva is tied with the *kankan*

King Jagajyotirmalla has sung this song for his pleasure,

Only one or two wise persons

In a lakh can understand it.

*The Song Sung by the Rishi in Raga Asavari*

There arose a funny situation when Shiva stepped on the wedding altar. His thick crop of hair mounted over His head got hooked up, which led to

the unleashing of the Ganga, the bullock Basaha accompanying Him started eating Kush grass used in religious ceremony, and the serpent Basuki seeing *lawā* or roasted paddy raised its head and started hissing. Lawa was swarmed by the gushing Ganga, the hungry Basuki started picking up lawa and eating it. The tiger-skin was over flooded, Basuki was hissing and bullock despaired. The poet Vidyapati wishes Shiva to bless King Rupnarayan to live long. The character of Shiva is as good as His appearance.

MAINA: O Rishishwar, listen to my entreaty.

### *The Song by Maina in Raga Malva*

The five-headed destroyer of Tripur Asur is indeed very terror-striking. Yet He has been named Shankar, the Harmonizer. He has three eyes, all emitting fire, and nobody knows to which lineage He belongs. He has no parents and is playing with the serpent. He has besmeared His head with ashes and wanders all around. He has killed the god of love, but is obsessed with love for Parvati, the epitome of feminine form. Then which divine damsel can make Him normal? He has let the sacred Ganga mount his head, and yet He unfolds his matted locks of hair. Should somebody riddle of this incompatibility of the right and wrong of Lord Shiva poet Vidyapati sings, and addressing Manayin, says who can teach the teacher of the Universe. King Shiva is as handsome as Lord Narayan and He is the celestial tree which satisfies all the wishes of seekers.

MAINA: O Rishishwar, the character of Shiva is too mysterious to be understood.

### *The Song Set in Raga Varari*

The ritual of massaging with cosmetics, proper for the wedding ceremony, should begin. It contains the paste prepared with musk-deer extract, and sandalwood. All these decorations are not liked by the Lord. Instead He takes pleasure in *bhang* (hemp) and intoxicating *dhatūra* and he likes ash as his talcum powder. He decorates his body with venomous serpents as ornaments. How can I elaborate His unnaturalness. So, ladies, you can always peep and have a view of the Lord. How can I apply collyrium to his eyelids as His eyes are emitting fire like the sun? Then how can I keep my hands in normal position? King Jagajyotirmalla proclaims that He is at the root of all in the universe and the whole world knows it.

### *Chorus in the Bed-Chamber of the New Couple in Raga Dhanashree*

It is Lord Shiva who is the creator of all the three worlds. He is the sustainer of the three worlds, and so He is the most auspicious one who brings all

blessings to the world. He is embellished with the jewels of the serpents and is absolutely white in complexion. Though there is the fire of the sun in His eyes, the soothing moon on His forehead removes all troubles. Two of His hands show the boon of fearlessness and the other two hands carry a trident and a percussion instrument. King Jagajyotimalla sings this *kobar* song which the remover of all sins.

SHIVA: O King of the mountains, all my wishes have been fulfilled. Hence give me permission to go to my hermitage.

HIMALAYA: O benevolent Lord of the poor, let me pray you.

*The dual song by Himalaya and Maina in Raga Malva.*

*(To the Mahadeva)*

The gods and the demons equally worship your feet. Our hopes must be fulfilled as you are generous at heart and as large as the frontiers of the universe. We earnestly implore that you should keep Parvati with all love and kindness. You are present in the soul of all the living creatures. There is the thundering sound of rejoicing by the heavenly bodies in the sky, which is heard from my mountain and it gladdens our heart. At first when we saw your three eyes, we committed some discourtesy. This you should forgive and forget. There are tears of joy in our eyes and blissful sensations in our bodies. King Jagajyotimalla in all humbleness expresses devotion to the Lord.

*The meaning of the song is conveyed through music*

HIMALAYA : O Lord, as you are the Lord of the whole Universe, do as you please.

*Shiva along with His followers, exits amidst music in Raga Deshakh.*

This auspicious marriage cannot had anything but good. The divine couple Shiva-Parvati is destined to be eternal.

*(The use of Kona language.)*

SHIVA: O Parvati, as you are delicate, you ride on the back of the bullock.

*(Parvati looks at him lovingly)*

RISHI: O Lord, Parvati is the daughter of a king, tender in body, so proceed slowly.

SHIVA: O Rishishwar, it is so indeed.

MAINA: O Lord, I am greatly depressed due to the separation of Parvati !

HIMALAYA: O Lord of the three Worlds !

MAINA: O Lord hear my entreaty.

*The Song Sung by Maina*

O Lord Shivashankar, though you are simple and live as an ascetic, I know you are very white in complexion. You live in the hermitage but in



reality you relish all the acts of charm as a lover. You keep the moon on your head. All your acts of penance and meditation have been lost as your mind is occupied with the love of the lady. What is this change? Your sweet tongue is only deceptive as you have seduced my Parvati. You are so artful. There is a festoon of skulls adorning your shoulder like a garland. Your garment is the skin of the tiger together with the festoon of serpents, "Bishnupuri" is the servant of Lord Shiva. The Lord should satisfy my wishes. He is present in the entire universe.

HIMALAYA: He is the Lord of the universe. How can you, Maina, know His divine character? My daughter has found the best place. It is His immense love that has made her a half of his identity. This is all I tell you and you should hear it.

*The Song Sung by Himalaya in Raga Dhanashree*

Victory to Shiva, the destroyer of Tripura. Victory to the half-male and half-female. One half of his body is white in complexion and the other half is wheatish. Half of His body is covered by a tiger skin and the other half by a sari. One half is occupied with Yoga and the other half with the fulfilment of worldly desires. One half carries the divine bow and arrow and the other half is decorated with jewels. Half of the body has the festoon of the skulls while the other half is having the festoon of pearls. Similarly, one half is decorated with sandal-wood paste and the other half is smeared in ashes. Half of the body has the moon, the other half has vermilion. Half the form is quite unattractive and the other half charms the whole world. The poet sings and says that only God knows His proper form. Both Lord Shiva and Devi Parvati bear two bodies but one soul.

HIMALAYA: O Maina, the marriage ceremony of Parvati is completed and we should therefore now move to the inner apartment.

MAINA: (To Himalaya) O Lord, this will be done exactly as you say.

*Maina and Himalaya exit with music in Raga Malva*

The real form of Lord Shiva is not known even to sages,  
Only my Parvati knows Him, she is devoted to Lord Shiva.

HIMALAYA: I am so fortunate that my son-in-law Shiva is the Lord of the universe.

MAINA: This is also due to the Divine favour. (Second Kona) Blessed is my womb from which Parvati has taken her birth.

HIMALAYA: So always keep Parvati and Shiva in your memory.

*Ninth Sambandha*

*Shiva, along with the Rishi and Parvati, enters amidst a musical rendering of Raga Varar (Kona language).*

SHIVA: O Rishishwar, this Bagwati river, very sacred, came out of my act of laughter.

RISHI: Very cold water ! O Lord, as you are named *Pashupati*, where do you live ?

SHIVA: Now I have come to that place. . . . O Rishishwar, this Nepal Mandal is a part of the Himalaya mountain and is very sacred. There flows the river Bagwati. There is the Pashupati palace and the seat of Goddess Parvati. This region is the holiest place on the earth.

RISHI: From the top of the Himalaya originates river Bagwati. It is considered to be a hundred times more sacred than Bhagirathi Ganga. There is Lord Pashupati to the east of Gokarna. Those taking bath in this river are blessed enough to go to Shiva-loka, thereby leaving this mortal world. This is the greatness of the sacred Bagwati river. All this has been said in the *Varaha Purana* referring to the Nepal Mandal.

SHIVA: Indeed. ( *To Parvati* ) O Parvati, you seem to be disinterested.

### *Parvati sings in Raga Varali*

O Mother! how should Parvati sustain herself ? What I have found as the only thing of worth is a bagful of ashes. Neither is the house properly built nor is there any garment for covering the body. One cannot get anything by borrowing. My sons and their father remain tormented with hunger. With what resources can I remove their bite of hunger ? Serpent Basuki lives on air and Lord Shiva himself lives on poison. When the serpent and the Lord are thus in unity, what way can I find for maintaining myself ? My husband is completely emaciated with His belly sunk. His cheeks are shrunk and even His eyelashes have turned pale. Fate has put me in the hands of such an old groom, so I must have been a sinner. My mother did not take any consideration. Nor did my father take any pains to search for a groom for me. It was all left to fate to have its own way. What has been ordained by fate cannot be changed by anyone. So I am agonised at heart. Poet Vidyapati says to Parvati: "Your groom is the Lord of the universe. He is the Lord of the gods of the world; such is your husband. You should serve Him with all devotion."

### *A Song is heard*

SHIVA: O dear, this is my nature. Why do you get angry for nothing ?

### *The Song Sung by Shiva*

O moon-faced lady, do not hang your head in remorse. If you cast a glance upon me, I would be overjoyed. O dear, one should not be angry

without proper cause. O object of adoration, tell me, what is my fault? Your lips are as tender and fresh as a new blossom. Do not let them fade by your exhaling hot sighs. The pang of separation is burning our body. This body is really quite frightening. Your body appears to be the god of fire. But it should indeed be like the festoon of *malati* flowers. God is really very clever in taking away your normal wisdom. Listen, O Parvati! there is no adoration without a husband.

PARVATI: O lord, now you have said enough to me.

### *The Song Sung by Parvati in Raga Rajvijay*

O ascetic! your penance has prevented anybody from degenerating into a mendicant and so you have got Princess Parvati. O ascetic, you are delighted in looking at my face while Your face itself has many beautiful forms to exhibit. You have got the annointed locks of hair in the midst of which is the moon. Here the moon appears to be the axis around which the locks of Your hair is situated. I have culled flowers for your sake, but they have been reduced to grazing grass by your bullock. The poet Bishnupuri sings and says: " This Yogi is nobody else than the Master of the universe."

SHIVA: (*To Parvati*) O darling, listen to me.

*Har-Gauri Vivaha*, 17th century

Tr. by Mini Mishra

## Happy Kuvalayashva

VAMSHAMANI JHA

VAMSHAMANI JHA (Vamṣamaṇi Jhā, c. 17th century) was the author of several plays in Maithili which were staged before his patrons Pratapamalla (1630-1689) and Jagajyotirmalla (1618-1637). *Muditakuvalayashva* (1628) is his best-known work.

*Muditakuvalayashva* (Muditākuvālayāśvā) is a full-length play in five acts. Its format is the same as that of Sanskrit plays. The sutradhar or manager and his companions describe the occasion, the theme and the authorship or patronage in detail. The stage-directions are in Sanskrit; sometimes quite elaborate, sometimes cryptic. The sense of the stage is acute. The curtain is used as often as necessary. The exits and entrances are indicated carefully, not merely through expressions like "exit", "enter", and "speech from the corner or by action real or imaginary, but also by suitable entrance or exit music or songs. The musical directions are thorough. Indeed, the play has more music than literature. However, prose speeches are interspersed with verse or song. The plays were performed in an

open air theatre during the day and the spectators had to rely upon their imagination in the absence of elaborate stage realism.

The story of the play is based on a popular legend which was originally given in the *Markandeya Puran* (10th-12th century). It is meant to illustrate how prayers to Shiva and Shakti could achieve miracles. A seer named Galab requests Shatrujit, the reigning king, to protect his peaceful religious pursuits from the demons. The king asks his son Kuvalayashva to help the seer. He succeeds in driving the demons away. In pursuit of them he reaches the nether world of demons and finds a damsel named Madalasa who had been made a captive there by the demon Patalketu. Patalketu gets killed. Another seer helps Madalasa become free and get married to Kuvalayashva.

Two excerpts from the play are given below, representing the action on the third day and the fifth day.

The first extract chosen from the play relates to the story at this stage. Patalketu's brother Talketu avenges Patalketu's death by playing a trick upon Kuvalayashva. He meets Kuvalayashva on the bank of Yamuna and pretends in the garb of a seer to have run short of money for paying the priest's fees at a sacrifice. Kuvalayashva gives him his costly ornaments. He takes the ornaments by force of magic to Kuvalayashva's parents and reports that the demons had killed Kuvalayashva. Madalasa could not bear the news and dies.

When Kuvalayashva returns home and learns of the death of Madalasa, he goes mad and takes a vow that he would not marry any other woman. He wanders in distant lands and meets his friends in Nagaland, two sons of a Naga. Their father Kambala offers prayers to Shiva and Goddess Saraswati to help Kuvalayashva get back Madalasa.

In the second extract Shiva is pleased with the prayers of Kambala and tells how to regain Madalasa. Kambala goes through the process and eventually presents the new Madalasa to Kuvalayashva. Thereupon the happy prince comes back to his own kingdom and lives happily ever after.

The diction of the play is throughout elegant. Some of the passages are remarkably chaste and powerful and have occasionally a rich literary flavour.

### *Dramatis Personae*

KING	Shatrujit
QUEEN	Wife of Shatrujit
LADY-IN-WAITING	Maid-servant of the Queen
KUVALAYASHVA	Son of Shatrujit
BRAHMIN/SAGE/DVIJA	Courtiers
SENTRY	Kotwal, Doorkeeper
GALAB	A seer
PATALKETU	A demon

TALKETU	Brother of Patalketu
MADALASA	A Gandharva damsel
KAMBALA	King of Nagas
ASHVATAR	Brother of Kambala
SONS OF NAGA	Sons of Kambala, any two Nagas
NAGIN	Wife of the king of Nagas
MAHADEVA, PARVATI, ETC.	Gods

*On the Third Day*

KUVALAYASHVA: O dear, it is my good luck that I've got you as my companion,  
but let me not waste all the time in merry-making. Everyday after offering  
respects to my father, I should go to discuss matters of the state.

MADALASA: My lord, such are the duties of a king.

*(Kupalayashva leaves the stage with a Song)*

*(Kamoda Raga: Ek Tal)*

Daily after making obeisance to my father,  
I rush towards all the officers  
And move around all the corners of the kingdom.

*(Speech from the corner)*

KUVALAYASHVA: I should now quickly reach and pay respects to my father.

SENTRY: Order me, O Prince !

MADALASA: O God ! the pangs of separation (from my husband) are  
unbearable even for a moment.

*(Madalasa sings a separation song)*

*(Malava Raga: Ek Tal)*

So far my days were happy  
But now my husband has gone to other lands  
And is lost in the enjoyment of another woman.  
Elsewhere this is not seen.  
A lady should therefore do what is in her interest.  
She would be justified in doing what she thinks proper.  
Men are a shameless lot;  
Yet they are everywhere in the ascendant.  
They ruin the life of their beloveds

By breaking their hearts.  
 What can I do when God himself is unreasonable !  
 He has not given me wings  
 That I could observe him fully.  
 The meritorious king Jagajyotimal sings  
 "O lady ! listen to me.  
 Your lover will meet you appreciating your love."

MADALASA: O friend, where shall I see him ?

FRIEND: Why don't you say it briefly ?

MADALASA: O friend, listen to me.

*Madalasa replies through a Lagni song*

*(Kedar Raga: Pratham Ek Tal)*

My husband has left me and gone to other lands.  
 O friend, tell me  
 When shall I be able to see him to my fill ?  
 Only then it will be a happy day.  
 Then alone, O friend, shall I be consoled.  
 Soon, I shall meet my lover:  
 Thus my mother-in-law, sisters-in-law, elders  
 And others assure me of his early arrival.  
 But I'll be satisfied  
 Only when I see him to my fill.  
 I have reserved my eyes waiting for him.  
 Slyly, I shall let my clothes fall,  
 So that something more figures out  
 And all my woes shall end on revealing it.  
 The two auspicious pitchers  
 At a propitious moment I shall playfully contrive  
 That all other troubles may be borne by a woman.  
 But not the pains of obliviousness.

King Jagajyotimal says: "This *Lagni* song  
 May cheer up the listeners all around  
 By bringing to mind the traits of the Lord."

LADY-IN-WAITING: O Queen, let both of us sing together a *Kobar* song.

MADALASA: By all means, O friend.

*(Kobar song in Dhanashri Raga)*

We all see to our fill  
 The lovely 'lord' who is

Like a million love-gods.  
 He is captivating, lovely, dear.  
 We shall carry golden pitchers  
 To welcome him and sing of his excellence.  
 We will decorate our eyes with collyrium,  
 Having thoroughly made ourselves up,  
 We'll converse  
 Embrace him like a garland  
 And make ourselves happy.  
 King Jagjyotimal sings with devotion  
 To attain the Feet of the Lord.

MADALASA : O Friend, let us sit with the great Queen in the White Palace.

LADY-IN-WAITING : Well said.

*(Drawing the curtain, Madakasa and the Lady-in-Waiting exits)*

*(Here Ends the Ninth Sambandha)*

*(Speech from the Corner)*

MAHADEVA : O Parvati, let us go to Kailas.

PARVATI: Yes Lord, certainly, O Lord of the Gods, make haste.

MAHADEVA : By all means, *(moving forward)* this Kailas is a holy place. Let us rest a while here.

PARVATI: O Lord, as you desire.

*(Mahadeva and Parvati rest on Kailas)*

MAHADEVA : O Parvati, listen to me.

PARVATI: I shall obey you, my Lord.

*(Sings in Ganda-Malava Raga)*

O mistress of the world,  
 O Parvati, your virtues have inspired me  
 To do all that I have done.

PARVATI: O Lord of the Lords, I also have a request to make.

MAHADEVA : Speak out.

*(In Parvatiya, Malava Raga: Ek Tal)*

PARVATI: Do not praise the home.

O Lord, who can be conversant with your various forms?

MAHADEVA : O Parvati, let us rest here for a while.

PARVATI: O Lord of the three worlds, as you please.

MAHADEVA : O Parvati, remain inside for a while.

PARVATI: O yes, Lord of the Lords.

*(In Malowa melody. Talketu noisily emerges on the bank of Yamuna river  
and speaks from the corner)*

TALKETU: O demons, we'll defeat Prince Kuvalayashva by deceit.

Demons: Yes Talketu, proceed.

*(Speech from another corner)*

Rakhasa: O Talketu, make haste to create the world of enchantment.

TALKETU: O demons, of course. This bank of Yamuna is the best location for creating the world of enchantment.

*(The song of the creation of the world of enchantment)*

*(Malva Raga)*

Let us take rest on the bank of Yamuna.

Here are bees, and cuckoos enchanting,

A splendid pond, full of lotus and lily,

Luring passers-by at first sight,

Sages have built beautiful temples here.

There is a sacrificial pit, a sanctuary and an altar.

Impersonate a seer

I can variously subjugate the life of that heir-apparent

King Jagjyoti who is devoted to Goddess Chandi sings:

The mind of the sinner is thus

Turned to evil through enchantment.

TALKETU: O demons, he killed my brother, took away my girl, and plentifully upbraided me. For this reason we shall not fight openly. But we shall deceive him impersonating as sages.

*(Kuvalayashva enters with his troupe to the accompaniment of music)*

*(Lalit Raga : Ek Tal)*

KOTWAL: Let your highness' words be carried out.

Very pleasant looks this place of the sages

Mere sight of it creates joy in our hearts.

*(Speech from a corner)*

KUVALAYASHVA: O Kotwal, observe all sites to decide the whereabouts of Patalketu.



*(From another corner)*

KOTWAL: O Lord, proceed forth quickly.

KUVALAYASHVA: By all means.

KOTWAL: O Lord, I find the place splendid.

KUVALAYASHVA: This is perhaps a sylvan hermitage.

*(The sage of the enchanted hermitage is also visible to Kuvalayashva)*

SAGE: Victory to you. My blessings in the name of all the four Vedas.

KUVALAYASHVA: O Chief of the sages, accept my reverence.

SAGE: Your appearance has given me great pleasure. Now, grace my house by your visit.

KUVALAYASHVA: As your holiness wishes.

SAGE: O Lord, pray, adorn this seat.

KUVALAYASHVA: As you desire.

SAGE: O Lord, please listen to something real that has happened.

*(The song sung by the sage of enchantment)*

*(Korav Raga : Haraja Tal)*

Because of my great weakness I could not know how to please my priests,

By giving gifts in the form of gold. How may I satisfy

The priests by making a gift of gold?

O king, fortune has provided me with your benefaction.

All that was lacking will now be fulfilled by your kindness.

I performed a *yajna*, but couldn't give gold in *dakshina*<sup>1</sup>

It will now be possible to ward off my sin.

The beggars will be satisfied with your presence

As with the *kalpataru*<sup>2</sup> its devotees are.

King Jagiyoti says that Lord Shiva shall fulfil all the desires.

With great effort, victory will be great,

Let not you therefore lessen your generosity.

SAGE: O King, my *yajna* complete in all respects but for *dakshina*.

It would have remained a debt, had you not arrived.

It was an embarrassment.

*(In Sanskrit)*

*(First verse)*

The mind is purified by words,

Ears are purified by hearing good things,

And hands are purified by charity.

1. Gift-offering.

2. Tree of wish-fulfilment.

(*Second verse*)

A man's days on this earth are limited  
The world is so short-lived  
That a long association of the body is not possible  
Who does not curse the world and cheer another.

(*Third verse*)

All my life I have not begged anything for self  
But for other persons.  
And have passed by eating vegetables in the evening.  
I may sacrifice my dearest possession of my life like a straw.  
KUNVALAYASHVA: O great sage ! There is no problem of wealth in my kingdom.  
I'm expounding something to you.  
SAGE: Please, go ahead my lord.

(*Kunvalayashva sings*)

(*Megh-Malhar Raga: Pratham Tal*)

KUNVALAYASHVA: You know *nyaya*, *purana* and *vedas* all.  
Pray, don't talk timidly,  
Now that you have seen me.  
If you have a trouble any more  
That will be a shame to me.  
You may ask for horses and elephants,  
You will get everything,  
For I consider my wealth to be a trifle.  
Tell, how much debt you owe  
If someone has pestered you,  
Tell me his name.  
I have driven away and killed Patalketu  
From the *yajna* of Galab.  
Millions of gem-bedecked bracelets and necklaces  
Take as many of them as you need  
And fulfil your desires.  
King Jagjyotimal believes that  
Shiva is the Lord of the three worlds,  
Ordinary things don't glitter for ever.  
KUNVALAYASHVA: You take these ornaments worth millions and use them for  
whatever purpose you like.  
SAGE: O Lord, glory be to you like that of Parasuram, Bali, Harishchandra and  
so on and so forth, whom you've defeated. I'm a hermit. I don't need

wealth. I have accepted the amount of *dakshina* from you and my purpose is done. Now I shall enter the Yamuna to worship Lord Varuna. Till then you may guard my hermitage.

KUVALAYASHVA: I'm at your hermitage.

*(Carrying away the necklace and ornaments, Talketu disappears into the waters of Yamuna)*

TALKETU: I've achieved what I wanted and should therefore hurry up.

KUVALAYASHVA: While the great sage is in the waters to worship Lord Varuna, may we rest a while in the hermitage.

OTHER SAGES: Certainly, my Lord.

(Curtain drops)

*(Tenth Sambandh is over)*

*(After the curtain is raised, the king enters with his family)*

KING: O Queen, our son Kuvalayashva hasn't returned as yet.

QUEEN: I am also worried about that.

*(Then enters the false sage with a song)*

I shall take revenge of my brother's death  
And inflict upon him great pain.

*(Speaks from the corner)*

SAGE: My efforts have borne fruit. I have brought the bracelet and necklace through the river Yamuna. Now I shall put the king to deep sorrow.

*(Speaks from another corner)*

SAGE: Let me make haste to complete this task.

O gate-keeper ! I have come in a haste, please inform the king.

GATE-KEEPER: O certainly.

My Lord, a sage has arrived at the gate, he is in a great hurry.

KING: Escort him to me.

Gate-Keeper: Great sage, you may enter.

SAGE: Oh ! Surely.

May the Lord shower all prosperity on you !

KING: O great sage, what brings you here ?

SAGE: The news is not good and I am reluctant to break it.

KING: Tell me.

SAGE: Today Kuvalayashva was waiting for the sage. There, he had to fight with a cruel demon. Your son showed great prowess, which couldn't be easily warded off. Then, deceitfully, the cruel demon pierced a spear into his chest. While, dying he gave me these ornaments. His rites were performed by the hermits. The horse was carried away by the demon. I have come to you to narrate the events. I brought this necklace to satisfy your curiosity. I have no need of them.

KING: O God, it is a great sorrow.

MADALASA: Such bereavement has befallen upon me !

*(Song in Sarangi Raga)*

*(Madalasa pauses)*

A sad person cannot bear the pangs of separation  
 All my hopes have been shattered.  
 It is very difficult to express  
 For what fate has given me this reward.  
 As the night cannot exist without a moon  
 So a woman cannot exist without her lover.  
 As the day goes away in the absence of the sun,  
 A ray of lightning exists only with the cloud.  
 As there is no use of this life for me,  
 Not for a moment can I live without him.  
 Day by day my feeble body will decay.  
 My mind fails to find any way out.  
 King Jagjyoti says that devotion to  
 Lord Shiva's feet alone can reduce pain.  
 For we all know that the path of devotion is never in vain.  
 Through which one positively can attain happiness day by day.

MADALASA: O Friend, I should die.

*(Madalasa sings another plaintive song)*

*(In Murkhi Raga : Ek Tal)*

While embracing me (at the time of departure), the necklace was  
 not returned to me,  
 The ornament of the hair was also not given back to me  
 And he himself is far away now,  
 Like the *chakora* bird, I cannot bear the separation of night,  
 How shall I bear the pain of separation from my lover !  
 Separation for a moment looks like separation for an era  
 O friend, I shall give up my life.  
 Even while death beseeches me,  
 I shall not be able to see my lord.

*(In the melancholy melody a song is sung)*

*(A Nachari Song)*

On hearing about the death of Kuvalayashva  
The sad news has stopped the mind.  
As if a poor man has lost his gem.  
How can he now regain it ?  
Jagjyoti sings the pathetic song,  
Devotion to Lord Shiva alone can wipe off my sorrow.

*(Saying "O Lord", Madalasa dies)*

KING: O lady, our son died there, here Madalasa has died. For what sins has  
all this happened ?  
QUEEN: O Lord, all this has happened because of my ill luck, I cannot speak  
any more.

*(The king speaks in Sanskrit)*

KING: In the moments of sorrow one should have patience,  
Forgiveness in prosperity, restraint in boldness.  
Good men are known by these qualities.

*(When the queen is stunned)*

QUEEN: Could Shiva change the pangs of separation of Sati ?  
Could Ram change the pangs of separation of Sita?  
Our fate will be as destined  
Or fate has destroyed us.

KING: O Lady ! this body made of five elements does not last for ever. Let  
us perform the last rites of Madalasa.

*(Madalasa is taken away, drawing the curtain)*

*(The sage leaves with a song Korava Raga: Par Tal)*

*(Speech from the corner)*

*(Speech from the second corner)*

SAGE: What you did unto me has now come to you and has aroused the  
enmity of my brother in me.

**KING:** Lend me your ear.

**QUEEN:** My lord, I am attentive.

*(Korav Raga: Pratham Tal)*

**KING:** Nothing can be gained by shedding tears. Human body is transient.

Son, friend, wealth, relations, wives all.

He earned a glorious name for our dynasty.

Kept it blameless in the battle-fields

On my persuasion, he redeemed the glory of two gods,  
(idols of gods restored)

And washed off all the filth of sin.

Everybody's body, which is full of foul things, is subject to decay.

Any amount of sermons cannot bring it back to life.

He earned blameless fame; we need not comment on him.

There is no good repenting over his death again and again.

Lady Madalasa was a pious lady; the pangs of separation

From her husband were unbearable to her.

So she left her body easily. She has redeemed three families  
simultaneously.

Who has not felt the pangs of separation from one's beloved?

King Jagjyoti says that one's devoted mind

Should be placed at the feet of Shiva which alone can do good.

Whatever virtuous action had vanished due to sin

Is revived once again on meeting sorrows

O lady, you have done great deeds! Sorrow cannot bring anything now.

**QUEEN:** My Lord, I propose to say something that has come to my mind.

*(Sings in Malva Raga: Khari Tal)*

O king, the evil has not disappeared

By what have you earned pure fame fully!

The words of our parents are the proof of this.

They gave their lives for the cause of cow and Brahmin.

They had resuscitated the dynasty.

They never disappointed their friends and those in need.

O king, relate to me the news of the battle field so that

The pain of bearing a son in my womb may become fruitful.

O king, on bad days we should have patience.

King Jagajyoti, devoted to Lord Shiva, sings this song.

**QUEEN:** O king, ill-fated misfortune has to be forgotten.

KING: You are right, my dear. Let us spend some time in religious discourse.

QUEEN: Yes, your orders are to be followed.

*(Drawing the curtain, the king leaves the place with his family)*

*(Here ends the Eleventh Sambandh)*

*(Drawing the curtain Kuvalayashva enters the enchanted hermitage)*

KUVALAYASHVA: O Sage, the great sage has not returned yet, a lot of time has passed.

SAGE: O Prince, he has arrived.

*(With Music in Tori Raga: Chauk Tal, the false sage enters the enchanted hermitage)*

*(Speech from the corner)*

SAGE: (*To himself*) I have achieved what I wanted. Now I should go quickly to the ashram. (*To the king*) O king, Lord Varun was satisfied, you have fulfilled my desire.

KUVALAYASHVA: I am going back to my kingdom.

SAGE: O lord, may you prosper !

*(Kuvalayashva exits with a song)*

*(Music in Tori Raga: Chau Tal)*

Today I have been very late. When shall I be able to pay respects to my father's feet?

Now I have been successful in making the sages fully satisfied.

*(Speech from the corner)*

KUVALAYASHVA: O sentry, I am very late; let us make haste.

SENTRY: Yes, by all means.

*(Speech from another corner)*

SENTRY: O lord, today you are late for worship.

King: O sentry, I am just coming.

TALKETU: O demons, all my work is finished; let us return to our kingdom.

[All] : O king of demons, by all means.

*(Talketu goes out with his followers)*

*(Nata Raga: Pari Tal)*

Let us all return to the world of demons,  
I have finished all my work.

I have pierced my enemy's heart and have  
Earned happiness for my state.  
I am relating to you a funny incident. Please listen.

*(Speech from the corner)*

TALKETU: O demons, listen ! I have a wonderful tale to tell you. If the prince is killed on the battlefield, he will go to heaven. I have got killed his dear wife so that as long as he lives, the pain of her death will pierce him and bring continuous death to him.

DEMONS: O Talketu, you have avenged your brother's enmity.

*(Speech from another corner)*

DEMONS: O brave Talketu, you have done a great job; let us make haste for this reason.

TALKETU: Go home and make merry.

*(Here Twelfth Sambandh ends)*

*(The king enters with his family after the curtain has been drawn)*

KING: O lady, on the left side of *pipal* tree, the cuckoo is singing.

QUEEN: I also think so.

*(Kupalayashva enters with a Song)*

*(Baradi Raga: Rupak Tal)*

*(Speech from the corner)*

KUPALAYASHVA: O sentry, I see everybody's face gloomy.

SENTRY: As we are tired, we find others gloomy.

KUPALAYASHVA: O father, O mother, my deepest reverence to you.

*(Embracing him with amazement, king and queen become mute)*

KING & QUEEN: Long live my child, why have you come late today ?

KUPALAYASHVA: O father, O mother ! Today, I happened to enter the hermitage of a sage. He had performed a grand sacrifice, but he couldn't make arrangements for the payment of *dakshina*. Therefore, I offered him my necklace and bracelet. The sage took them and entered into Yamuna to worship Varun. Therefore, I am late.

*(Looking at his face the king and the queen are stupefied)*

KUPALAYASHVA: O father, O mother, why are you not looking quite normal today?



KING: O son, a sage brought us a very sad news. He told us that you fought a demon and he pierced a spear deceitfully in your chest. The sage gave us your necklace and bracelet. On hearing this message, Madalasa, like a holy person, gave up her life. Therefore, we are all sad.

KUVALAYASHVA: O my God !

*(Kupalayashva bewails her death in a song)*

*(Balali Raga : Rup Tal)*

God had created my dear spouse.  
 We were one in two bodies.  
 We shared our minds, time, behaviour.  
 In no way were we different.  
 Such devilish fate has now separated us.  
 I cannot live without Madalasa.  
 O sage, tell me please, consider  
 How should I have patience to bear this separation,  
 Patience is not able to make me bear the pang.  
 In the garb of a *nishi*, you showed affection for me  
 And won me over by extending the net of deceit.  
 Thus, have I understood the shrewdness of the demons !  
 How sweet words of good behaviour were spoken by you !  
 I shall also cast off my body at the spot  
 Where my virtuous wife died.  
 King Jagjyoti says that his desires would be fulfilled  
 Only by taking another birth !  
 In no other way is there likely to be any respite.  
*(The intention of the song is explained)*  
 O sage, fie on you ! Fie on my life !

*(Kupalayashva sings a pathetic song)*

*(Merthi Raga : Jati Tal )*

The palace gives me anguish and no comfort;  
 A ray of ice has become a burning fire-log;  
 The southern wind is pouring forth like poison;  
 The entire town has become a forest for me;  
 Fate has gone against me.  
 My life has become a burden to me in the absence of moon-faced  
 Madalasa,

*Chakor*-like, both my eyes are shedding tears.  
O Shiva, O Shiva, I see nobody else who will help me,  
Do something that may enable me to overcome these crisis.

*(In the same Raga : Ek Tal)*

I shall take poison and die.  
There is no other way to get rid of sorrow.  
Whom should I tell the distress of my heart ?  
Living even for a moment now is a calamity.  
King Jagiyoti, the kind man, sings that the heart's desires  
Can be fulfilled by the grace of Shiva.

*(Saying so he falls on the ground)*

KING: O Son, have patience. O great Brahmin, I cannot bear the sight of my son.

SAGE: O Prince, have patience. It does not behove you. You have to take care of the world; gods and Brahmins are your responsibility. Deceitful is the nature of evil persons.

*(Kauhi Raga : Ek Tal)*

The birds are enticed by offering grains,  
In the same way good people are entrapped by evil persons,  
The innocent victim, without any fault.  
They are on the look out for an opportunity to harm.  
They care not for what is right and noble.  
They never give up false words in favour of truth.

Fate has rendered insignificant the difference between  
This world and the other world.  
Despite effort, the evil cannot be changed.  
The infatuation of attachment makes even a sage negligent.

KUVALAYASHVA: O great sage, I know all that; still I cannot forget each and every shade of her love and wisdom. I have something more to say, how good persons may behave in such situations. Please listen to me.

BRAHMIN: Speak, O prince.

*(Kupalayashva speaks through a song)*

*(Malava Raga : Ek Tal)*

KUVALAYASHVA: Devotion to my father's feet is devotion to all gods.  
I have nothing to do with other devotions.

If I cannot continue to do so, I shall abandon my body.  
 Such is my great duty.  
 O sage, tell me what then may I do ?  
 A mountain of sorrows has befallen upon me.  
 Still my life does not go.  
 I shall assume the garb of a Yogi  
 And wander all over the land.  
 Therefore, I am afraid that I may die on the borders  
 By tearing my chest, but that would be tantamount to suicide.  
 Suicide, from every point of view, is a great sin.  
 The pain of separation from one's woman is great.  
 Lord Ram knows it all, it cannot be narrated to others.  
 None else will share this misery.  
 King Jagjyoti says that controlling oneself carefully,  
 One should be devoted to Goddess Chandi.  
 She can save one from misery.  
 Who does not have misfortune ?  
 Patience is in every way the essence of all living.

*(Verse in Sanskrit)*

O sage, I am not putting on the necklace for fear of reminding me of her.  
 In separation from her, I shall have no respite.  
 Either in heaven or on the earth.

*(In Vernacular Prose)*

On hearing my death, thoughtlessly she gave up her life like a *siddha*. The  
 same should be proper for me too.

SAGE: O prince, love is like that. But you should take care of your royal  
 duties. You must be respectful to gods and Brahmins. You have to be  
 respectful to your father. If you behave like that, your father will feel  
 neglected.

*(In Sanskrit Verse)*

Shiva bore the pangs of separation from Sati,  
 Ram also bore the pangs of separation from Janaki.  
 And they had no other option.

KUNALAYASHVA: O sage, you know about the three worlds. Therefore you  
 have spoken well, I have vowed that in my life I shall not enjoy any  
 other woman.

SAGE: It is something very difficult.

*(Drawing the curtain they go away)*

*(Thirteenth Sambandh ends)*

*(Enter both Kambala and Ashvatar with sons and family)*

*(Malhar Raga : Rup Tal)*

KAMBALA: O saviour from fears of the world ! O destroyer of the demons !  
 O purifier of the world ! O creator of the three worlds !  
 O giver of the mind's pleasures ! O killer of the enemies !  
 O giver of victory ! O giver of strength !  
 O source of delight to the gods ! O mitigator of sins !  
 O one seated on the lion ! O visitor of the battle-fields !  
 In the opinion of King Jagiyoti, the idea of bowing down at the feet of  
 Chandi,  
 In Mallar Raga and Jati Tal lies the ultimate shelter.  
 Brother, son, wife are all instruments for performing good deeds  
 But it is the Goddess Devi who impels our minds.  
 I therefore bow down to Her.

KAMBALA: O Ashvatar, may the king of the Nagas bestow upon us such a  
 mind!

TWO SONS OF NAG: O venerable Sir, your blessings give us supreme bliss.  
 On visiting this world, I have a desire to go and see its wonderful things.

KAMBALA: You may do what pleases you. I am going to look after the  
 kingdom. Meanwhile, you may enjoy yourself as you please.

*(Exit Song)*

*(Malav Raga : Ek Tal)*

I shall also go to discuss matters of state.  
 You go for your enjoyment on the earth.

*(Speech from the corner)*

KAMBALA: O Brother, let us go and sit in the general assembly,  
 ASHVATAR : That is right.

*(Speech from another corner)*

TWO SONS OF NAGA: Let us see what is happening in the world. Afterwards  
 we will sit at your feet.

KAMBALA: O son, O son, what you say is wholly right.

*(Fourteenth, Sambandh ends)*

*(After the curtain is drawn, Kuvalayashva enters)*

KUVALAYASHVA: O Brahmin, I am unable to contain myself. I shall watch the coming and going of men on this road.

BRAHMIN: As you please.

*(Speech from the corner)*

*(Korav Raga : Par Tal)*

FIRST SON OF NAGA: O brother, without Kuvalayashva, my mind is inattentive.

Second Son of Naga: O brother, of course.

*(Kuvalayashva embraces the two sons of Naga with pleasure)*

KUVALAYASHVA: O friend, without you I do not want to enjoy good things at all.

TWO SONS OF NAGA: O friend, we have also been to Patalpur, the nether world and passed the night breathing hard. In the morn, we are to come to see you.

KUVALAYASHVA: O friends, sons of Naga, I have had a misfortune. One day I waited for a sage two quarters of the night. Talketu came to take revenge on me assuming the garb of a false sage. He begged of me my necklace and bracelet which I gave him. He took them to my home and made a false announcement of my death. Madalasa could not bear this and breathed her last. I could not understand Talketu's deceitful intentions. Therefore, I took a vow that I will do nothing in this life with any woman other than Madalasa. Shall I tell you more of my distress, about my miseries?

Son of Naga: Say, O friend.

*(Kuvalayashva sings a song)*

*(Korav Raga : Pratham Tal)*

In whose absence, I could not live for a moment  
 Controlling myself I bore the evil news of her death,  
 While saving myself by not killing myself, I kept myself stable.  
 God alone knows how I could  
 Keep on living with pain; nobody else does.  
 Like the legendary *chakora* bird when the night is over.  
 Both of us shall meet the next day (in the next birth)

Till the end of this life and the beginning of the next I shall bear separation.  
 How sad has been my fate !  
 Whom shall I tell ? Who will realise my misery ?  
 Who will redeem me ?  
 O Shiva, O Shiva, I shall have to bear it with a firm heart.  
 It has struck me as if by lightning.  
 Everywhere life is terrible for me.  
 My home is like a forest to me.  
 King Jagjyoti says by serving the feet of Lord Shiva  
 All my sorrows will end.

*(Clarifies the intention of the song)*

O friend, separation is unbearable.

SON OF NAGA: O friend, all things that are born have decay.

Patience is required. What is unknown to you?

Still, listen to something from me also.

KUIVALAYASHVA: O tell me, my friend.

*(A song by sons of Naga)*

*(Sindura Raga : Pratham and Ek Tal)*

SON OF NAGA: Woman, gold, people and youth are worthless, transitory;

All the world is like a mirage.

Even water, earth and sky are not stable.

The human body is transient and the breath does not last long.

*Brahma* creates, *Vishnu* sustains us,

Lord *Shiva* himself carries away everything at the end.

The whole world is under the control of three elements—Satva, Rajas  
 and Tamas.

For this reason do not feel sad.

Earth, water, fire, wind and sky:

These five are moulded into a human body.

So are all men, Nagas, Kinnaras, demons, gods

All are swallowed by Time.

All the time devote your mind to the path of virtue.

King Jagjyotirmal likes the sentiments of a yogi

By worshipping the feet of Shiva one may obtain all happiness.

O friend, the water of patience shall extinguish the fire of sorrow.

KUIVALAYASHVA: O friend, you are right; the body is like that.

Still its infatuation is great.

NAGIN: My prince, we have reached our destination.

KUIVALAYASHVA: O friend, that is good.

*(The Sons of Naga leave with a Song)**(Gunjari Raga: Kharj Tal)*

Let us now go quickly to our home. Who knows  
when we may see the prince next?

*(Speech from the corner)*

FIRST SON OF NAGA: O brother, the conversation with the prince has made  
me sad.

SECOND SON OF NAGA: If you are sad, I am also sad.

*(Speech from the second corner)*

Now let us go home.

FIRST SON OF NAGA: Certainly.

KUVALAYASHIVA: O Brahmin, I am still restless.

BRAHMIN: O Lord, you should have patience.

KUVALAYASHIVA: O Brahmin, I should like to visit for a while the inner  
apartments.

BRAHMIN: Master, let us do as you desire.

KAMBALA: Darling, your sorrowful looks have made me worried.

Now listen to my words.

NAGIN: My Lord, command me.

KAMBALA: *(Sings)*

*(Dhanashri Raga: Chau Tal)*

I am curious to sport.

O dear ! I should like to embrace the flower tree.

NAGIN: O prince! Please attend to my speech.

KAMBALA: O tell me, darling.

NAGIN: *(Sings)*

*(Asavari Raga: Pratham Tal)*

O lord, another beauty is of your choice.

My lord, my youth and beauty are at your disposal.

*(Kambala and Ashvatar enter by drawing the curtain.)**(Speech from the corner)*

KAMBALA: O Ashvatar, make haste, let us go.

ASHVATAR : Yes, my brother, by all means.

DVIJA: O brother, let us make haste.

KAMBALA: O Ashvatar, yes.

ASHVATAR: O brother, let us stay here near the bush for a while.

KAMBALA: As you like, my brother.

ASHVATAR: O brother, both of us will stay for a while in *Dhaval Ghar* (White Palace).

KAMBALA: O brother, by all means.

*(Kuvalayashva draws the curtain and exits)*

*(Fifteenth Sambandh ends)*

*(Both Kambala and Ashvatar enter after the curtain is drawn)*

*(The two sons of Naga enter with music. Kedar Raga and Chau Tal)*

*(Speech from the corner)*

FIRST SON OF NAGA: Let us quickly pay respects at the feet of Father.

SECOND SON OF NAGA: O, sure.

*(Speech from another corner)*

Having heard of the prince's misfortune. I am dumb-founded.

FIRST SON OF NAGA: I am also very sad.

BOTH: We offer our salutations, Father.

KAMBAL: May you be happy, my sons ! With whom had you been spending the entire day?

TWO SONS OF NAGA: On the earth lives the son of King Shakrajit named Kuvalayashva. We have made friends with him, even more intensely than with our own lives. We spent some happy days with him.

KAMBALA: Blessed are you, my sons, that you have friendship with such an eminent person. I am very pleased to learn this. But let me know of something very dear to him.

NAGA: O father, he has everything to his fill. Listen.

*(The two sons for Naga sing)*

*(Kedar Raga: Chau Tal)*

Royal priests, secretaries, plentiful wealth,  
Lands, soldiers, all equally prosperous,  
If he had need for wealth, he could have the desire for it.  
Why should then I tell you about any of desired thing ?



He has taken a vow with anguish about one thing: that  
 Since he has lost his wife,  
 He would now be without a wife all his life.  
 We have a great anxiety as to how he  
 May bring back his wife to life from Death.  
 King Jagajyotir says there is a way out  
 What may not be achieved through devotion to Lord Shiva !

*(They both explain the intention of the song)*

O father, the separation of his wife has been a calamity to him.  
 KAMBALA: O son ! it would be difficult to revive his wife. If her body were  
 extant or if somehow her bones could be extant or her ashes, one could  
 take the help of charms etc. and bring her back to life. Where, nothing  
 remains, it is very difficult to revive, almost impossible.  
 NAGIN: O father, we have already told you that it is an unsurmountable task.  
 ASHVATAR: O son, it is really a very hard task. Even while knowing that the  
 limitations are great, one need not remain idle. That would be the sign  
 of a coward. The task should be certainly taken up. The success would  
 be in the hands of the Lord. I shall go to the famous Pakshavataran  
 Shrine (the place which was sanctified by the incarnation of Ganga) in  
 the Himalaya and we will perform a penance there.

*(Korav Raga : Ek Tal)*

I shall go to worship Saraswati Devi.  
 Nothing is impossible for those serving the feet of the Devi.

*(Speech from the corner)*

ASHVATAR: O Kambal brother ! let both of us go and become devotees of  
 Sarasvati with undivided attention.  
 KAMBALA: That would be the right thing to do.

*(Speech from another corner)*

KAMBALA: O brother, let us attempt it.  
 ASHVATAR: Hope to do well with the blessings of the Goddess.  
 TWO SONS OF NAG: O brother, let us stay for some while in the inner apart-  
 ments here.  
 SECOND SON OF NAG: Brother, by all means.  
*(Both sons of Naga exit after drawing the curtain)*

*(Sixteenth Sambandh ends)*

*(Both Kambala and Ashvatar enter sadly singing Gundu Raga)*

*(Speech from the corner)*

ASHVATAR: O Kambal, we are near the Himalaya.

KAMBALA: I also see it.

*(Speech from the second corner)*

KAMBALA: This is the Pakshavataran Shrine.

ASHVATAR: Yes, it is certainly so.

ASHVATAR: O brother, we are fortunate. This is the Himalaya and this is the Pakshavataran Shrine in the Himalaya. It is a suitable place for regorous penance.

KAMBALA: Taking bath three times a day, taking a regulated diet, observing all disciplines with a concentrated mind, devote yourself to the remembrance of the Goddess. Today is the auspicious Third Day, let us reflect upon the Goddess.

*(Kamara Raga: Pratham Ek Tal)*

O, Mother Bhavani ! We're all dependent on you  
We can sacrifice all for you.  
We care for none else here.  
Why are we attracted to the world ?  
Others might be devoted to other gods,  
My mind is fixed on you.  
My love is to you,  
As the moon's is to the water lily flower.  
King Jagajyotir says that he has no hope from any other quarter;  
We have been singing your virtues,  
Birth after birth.  
Only your feet are the shelter for us.  
We are your creations, destroy or preserve us.  
*(Thus ends the action of the third day)*

*On the Fifth Day*

MAHADEVA : O Kambalashvatar, you have sung better than gandharvas kinnaras. I am quite satisfied with your song.

KAMBALASHVATAR: O Lord of the lords. I cannot please you by singing you are always kind towards your devotees.

*(Mahadeva is singing a song of blessings)*

MAHADEVA : O Kambalashvatar, I want to say something; listen

KAMBALA: O Lord of lords, do speak.

*(Kanara Raga: Pratham Tal)*

MAHADEVA : You have sung well,  
 Which has in every way captivated me today.  
 Gods, kinnaras, sages, men could not reach me.  
 Your song has fascinated me (*refrain*)  
 By worshipping devotedly day and night  
 And you have depended on me.  
 I shall give whatever you want,  
 Wealth, men or kingdom.  
 King Jagajyotir says with devotion  
 If one devotes oneself to the feet  
 All glories and all treasures will be obtained.

MAHADEVA : O Kambalashvatar, ask for a boon quickly.

KAMBALA: O God of the gods, Kuvalayashva is a friend of my son. He lost his sweet-heart Madalasa through Talketu's deceitful action. Therefore he took a vow that he will not accept any other woman as wife in this life, except Madalasa. So I have approached you to deliver him from this distress.

MAHADEVA : O Kambalashvatar, is there something of her body, bones or ashes?

KAMBALA: O no, nothing of her is left.

MAHADEVA : Then, it would be a difficult task.

KAMBALA: O Lord, there is nothing difficult for you. You created the universe; here is the case of only a woman.

MAHADEVA : Your song has pleased me; go home. Perform her *tarpan*<sup>1</sup> with the idea of reviving her. While doing so, you should physically eat the lump of food offering. Thereupon from your middle fang along with a hiss, Madalasa will be born. She will remember her past and regain her former beauty, manners, age and virtues as they would have been three years later. This boon, I have given to you.

PARVATI: Let it be so !

KAMBALA: I am obliged.

*(Bows down again and again)*

O lord, we are going home.

MAHADEVA : Go home, your desire will be fulfilled.

*(Kambalashvatar exits with music in Tori Raga : Ek Tal)*

*(Speech from the corner)*

KAMBALA: We could please Mahadeva by the grace of Saraswati. Our desire is fulfilled; let us go home.

ASHVATAR: Yes.

*(Speech from another corner)*

This work will bring good. Kuvalayashva, my son and prince will be happy.

KAMBALA: What is the reason for any delay now ?

*(Mahadeva leaves the place with a song)*

MAHADEVA : O Parvati, let us go to our inner apartments.

PARVATI: O yes, my lord.

*(Tori Raga : Ek Tal)*

By awarding this boon you have pleased me.

Let us go to our inner apartment without any worry

O daughter of the Himalayas !

Let us all go home.

*(Speech from the corner)*

MAHADEVA : O Parvati, today, Nagraj sang a very good song.

PARVATI: Yes my lord, he sang well,

*(Speech from another corner)*

MAHADEVA : Let us sit inside.

PARVATI: As it pleases you.

*(Eighteenth Sambandh ends)*

*(Drawing the curtain, the two sons of Naga enter)*

FIRST SON OF NAGA: O brother, a very long time has passed and Nagraj has not returned.

SECOND SON OF NAGA: I am also worried about that.

*(Paharia Raga : Chau Tal)*

When will my desire be fulfilled ?

My mind is drowned in the ocean of anxiety.

If it does not rain in the rainy season,

How else will the problem be solved ?

Excessive thirst is quenched by drinking water substantially

A broken necklace can be set right only by tying it up

A winnower throws out the husk only for a while,

So also we need not curse the evil day.

Shiva wards off the sorrows by nature.

King Jagajyotirmal sings of this wonder.

FIRST SON OF NAGA: O brother, we should watch the arrival of our father.

SECOND SON OF NAGA: O yes, my brother, we shall do so.

*(Kambalashvatar enters with music)*

*(Ramakali Raga : Par Tal)*

*(Speech from the corner)*

ASHVATAR: O Kambala, my son will be very happy today.

KAMBALA: Such an activity will certainly bring about happiness.

*(Speech from the corner)*

KAMBALA: O brother, we are approaching the land of Nagas.

ASHVATAR: O, well said.

*(The sons of Naga offer obeisance)*

KAMBALA: O sons.

SONS: O Sir, accept our obeisance.

*(Nagraj embraces)*

KAMBALA: O son, when will Prince Kuvalayashva arrive here ?

SON : Father, why should he come here ?

KAMBALA: Then what is friendship ?

SON : O Sir, speak.

*(Ramakali Raga: Pratham Tal)*

Your body should be his.

His body should protect it.

You should accept the protection.

Both should bear each other's sufferings and enjoyments.

Such should be their affection.

These are all the ways of friendship. *(Refrain)*

Keep it a secret but enjoy it together yourselves.

Let everyone feel your friendliness.

A friend's sorrow should be taken as yours.

Take other's sorrows as your supreme sorrows.

Enjoy their joys as your supreme joys.

Go and invite them to your home.

Two bodies will become one though visible as two.

King Jagyotirmal says that their end will be at the feet of Lord Shiva.

Through his kindness, both will lead a stable life.

There are six indications of a friend:

Narrating or asking secrets, making or accepting a gift,

And eating or inviting to eat meals together.

KAMBALA: O son, go and quickly bring the prince.

SON OF NAGA: I shall do as you desire.

*(Exit song for the son of Naga)*

*(Kedar Raga: Pratham Tal)*

Both of us will go together in obedience to our father. And make every effort to be able to bring the prince with us. We will go ourselves for the welfare of the world-famous son.

*(Speech from the corner)*

FIRST SON OF NAGA: O brother, we are going for a noble purpose.

SECOND SON OF NAGA: Yes, it is so.

*(Speech from another corner)*

SECOND SON OF NAGA: We should do it with great care.

FIRST SON OF NAGA: We shall do as you say.

*(Subsequently)*

KAMBALA: O Ashvatar, perform the ceremony of giving the lump of food and eat it in the manner in which the Lord has asked you.

ASHVATAR: Certainly.

ASHVATAR: O Kambal, after eating it, this wonderful girl was born from his body.

KAMBALA: The words of the Lord can never go in vain. Bring her up very carefully.

ASHVATAR: Well said, I have visited all the three worlds but nowhere else is such a beauty.

*(Drawing the curtain, both of them leave the stage)*

*(Nineteenth Sambandh ends)*

*(Kupalayashva enters after drawing the curtain)*

KUVALAYASHVA: O, great Brahmin, Nagayashva is always punctual. Why is he so late?

BRAHMIN: O, see he has come.

*(Two sons of Naga enter with music in Dhamak Raga and Ek Tal)*

*(Speech from the corner)*

FIRST SON OF NAGA: Let us make haste.

SECOND SON OF NAGA: Oh, yes.

*(Speech from another corner)*

SECOND SON OF NAGA: Today, I am somewhat late.

FIRST SON OF NAGA: Yes, it is as you say.

*(On meeting Kuvalayashva, they embrace him one by one)*

KUVALAYASHVA: O friend, why are you late today ?

SON OF NAGA: O Lord, today my father told me something.

KUVALAYASHVA: What did he say ? Tell me.

SON OF NAGA: O my lord friend, confide mutually the matters to him, do not take your meals with him and do not feed him at your place. Accept the gift given by him and make it over to him. These are six signs of a friend. Thus we have different bodies but the same heart, and realise each other's joys and sorrows. Hence, he is very anxious to see you.

KUVALAYASHVA: Yes, yes, O friend, why should it be surprising. I take your father as my father.

SON OF NAGA: O, lord, I would like to say something.

KUVALAYASHVA: O friend, tell me.

*(Sings a Song in Deshak Raga: Ek Tal)*

SON OF NAGA: It is a happy day for me.

Let us enjoy for sometime in this land of Naga.

It is my father's desire to chat with you for a day.

May your company with me for the whole life be

A moment spent with you two !

The word friend has been formed by the maker.

To which no other word can be given as equivalent.

King Jagjyotirmal, the devotee of Lord Shiva, sings:

Good friendship is the result of great blessings.

KUVALAYASHVA: O lord, wise men do not require to be told much. Still I would like to say at least this much about the traits of a friend.

*(Speech in the form of a song)*

*(Malava Raga: Ek Tal)*

Very rightly, we are called friends, O well-wisher !

I have known you as my benefactor, O well-wisher !

Verily, you are like a brother to me, O well-wisher !

You have a character of repute, O well-wisher !

All our joys and sorrows are shared, O well-wisher !

Such are the ways of love, O well-wisher !

I have also this great desire  
That you rest for a while there, O well-wisher.  
King Jagjyotirmal sings, intimacy preserves good  
Relationship, O well-wisher!

KUVALAYASHVA: O friend, let us make haste.

SON OF NAGA: Yes, my lord.

*(In Tori Raga, Chauk Tal, Kuvalayashva and the two sons of Naga exit)*

*(Speech from the corner)*

KUVALAYASHVA: I would like to pay respects to your father.

SON OF NAGA: That is my good luck.

*(Speech from another corner)*

O prince, friend, yonder lies river Gomati.  
Along its bank one goes to the land of Naga.

Kuvalayashva: As my friend likes.

*(Thus ends the Twentieth Sambandh)*

*(On drawing the curtain Kambala and Ashvatar are seen with their families)*

KAMBALA: It is wonderful how within a short time, Madalasa has grown up,  
acquired manners and turned into a beauty.

ASHVATAR: All this is the wonder of Mahadev's creation. Today, Prince  
Kuvalayashva will arrive here. Let the surroundings be cleaned and the  
streets decorated with flags; and make arrangement for delicious dishes.

KAMBALA: All these formalities fit for the welcome of the prince have been  
made.

ASHVATAR: O Kambala, see that beauty queen Madalasa is properly concealed.

KAMBALA: Of course.

*(Kuvalayashva and the two sons of Naga enter and converse through  
songs)*

*(Gori Raga: Chauk Tal)*

Blessed is this land of the Nagas.  
Blessed is my place where the prince has come.  
Blessed are we the Nagas that we shall see our friend.  
That our father has gained the honour of being  
The essence of the world.

*(Speech from the corner)*

SON OF NAGA: O Royal friend, my father will have the pleasure of seeing  
you soon.

KUVALAYASHVA: I am also very eager.

*(Speech from another corner)*



## MEDIEVAL INDIAN LITERATURE

KUVALAYASHVA: O friend, meanwhile I am having a glimpse of the land of the Naga.

KAMBALA: What do you want me to do ?

*(The two sons of Naga and Kuvalayashva make obeisance to the king of the Naga. Kambala embraces and kisses their heads.)*

KAMBALA: O prince, I am fortunate. My eyes have been blessed that I have seen you. Please have your bath and meals. I shall be happy.

KUVALAYASHVA : O friend, what father says, is in every way proper.

KAMBALA: I am very happy to see Kuvalayashva. Let him rest for a while, call him some time later and then exchange words with him.

SON OF NAGA: O prince, your bath etc. are over; my father is highly pleased. Now let us chat for a while.

KUVALAYASHVA: O friend, why did father make such elaborate arrangements? For me there is no difference between this place and my home.

KAMBALA: We could not welcome you as well as you deserved. Oblige us by accepting what little we have been able to do for you. You have visited us for the first time. Please ask for something unusual in our house, sometime that you have been yearning to get.

KUVALAYASHVA: With your blessings my house is filled with everything.

KAMBALA: How do you say so ? Even the gods yearn for certain things. You think of something which you may wish to have.

KUVALAYASHVA: I am fully satisfied by just seeing you.

*(Saying so he casts a glance at the face of the son of Naga)*

SON OF NAGA: My dear father, the prince has everything of his own. What should he ask for ? He had a great fondness for Madalasa, his wife. The tricks of demons have deprived him of her. Love for her has made him abandon the desire for any other woman.

KAMBALA: This problem is impossible to solve. If the dead person or even her ashes were extant, she could be revived to life. In the absence of these, I see no other solution. *(After some meditation)* Perhaps O son, I may be able to show her through magic.

KUVALAYASHVA: O friend, let father show me her through an illusion. That is what I ask for.

KAMBALA: That is possible, O Ashvatar, bring her out of the room made of cloth.

ASHVATAR: Of course.

KUVALAYASHVA: O Madalasa, O Madalasa, — blessed am I.

*(Saying so he desires to catch hold of her by hand)*

KAMBALA: O prince, do not touch the illusion.

*(Kuvalayashva faints)*

KAMBALA: O prince, O prince, this is not worthy of you. Please, do not lose your senses.

KUVALAYASHVA: O, my friend's father kindly pay some attention to my words.

KAMBALA: O prince, speak.

*(Kupalayashva replies through a song.)*

*(Asavari Raga : Ek Tal)*

It is fortunate that my evil days are over.  
To hear the deep notes of music I am delighted.  
The performance of a limited reasonable work or other.  
By some one yields results a hundred times more  
By making one's nature noble.  
Glass also glitters in the company of gold.  
A good companionship brings unlimited virtues.  
How gloriously a full moon brightens a cloudy night.  
King Jagajyotirmal sings this also.  
One can achieve the impossible, if Shiva pleases.

KUVALAYASHVA: O friend's father, I am very, very happy to have such a friend.

KAMBALA: You are lucky. Now, listen to me.

KUVALAYASHVA: O friend's father, say as you please.

*(Both Kambala and Ashvatar sing)*

*(Kochgiri Raga: Pa. Ek. Pa. Tal)*

I heard of your misery, I felt sick.  
Then I courageously undertook an adventure.  
I went to the Himalayas and worshipped the Goddess and obtained a  
boon from Saraswati.

With the help of this achievement, I worshipped Pashupati,  
Madalasa is the boon from that Goddess.  
She is not illusory, but your woman.  
Now enjoy her as well as you may.  
Ask her about the past, she shall tell all.  
Do not have any doubts in your mind.  
Believe me, your desire has been fulfilled.  
Now, fate is not against you.  
Whatever safeguards in the vedas and puranas are prescribed  
They have been used by the gods.  
King Jagajyotirmal sings his advice :  
What can not be obtained by serving them  
O prince! I performed penance of Saraswati for twelve years.  
Satisfied with our prayers, she gave a boon to both of us.  
Afterwards, we went to Kailasa and worshipped Shiva  
And obtained Madalasa as a boon.  
Don't doubt any more, she is not an illusion.  
You may ask Madalas herself the story of her mysterious past.

KUVALAYASHVA: Even gods cannot be equal to me and that I have obtained through your kindness. Between father and son, there is no room for fraud. Your word is my authority.

KAMBALA: You should look into the matters of your state. Take Madalasa with you and set matters right in your kingdom.

KUVALAYASHVA: Father, I shall do as you wish.

KAMBALA: If there is yet some other how so ever small work to do, let me know.

KUVALAYASHVA: There is none else like you.

SONS OF NAGA: O prince, friend, you have blessed me and we are happy. Set your kingdom right.

KUVALAYASHVA: By all means.

*(Both Kuvalayashva and Madalasa exit)*

*(Malav Raga: Pratham Tal)*

Lord, we seek your shelter.

For the forest of lotuses achieves glory only in the light of the sun.

Please do not abandon us any more. *(Refrain)*

KUVALAYASHVA: O dear, we have been long separated.

MADALASA: O Sir, nobody else on this earth is as sad as I. Earlier, the demons carried me away from the home of my father. Again Talketu harassed me. I was relieved from that state by your valour. Then, the magic of that rogue kept me under bondage till now. What else shall I tell you?

*(Speech from the second corner)*

KUVALAYASHVA: O dear, fate is all powerful.

MADALASA: The king and queen have been very kind to us. Let us therefore go quickly to them.

KAMBALA: O daughter, you have rightly shown your respect for the affectionate manner in which their majesties had sent you off.

SONS OF THE NAGA: O father, no other father would do the work of his son in this way that you have done to me, and made me happy.

KAMBALA: A father should do the work of his son. Let us go. We shall now go inside the palace.

SONS OF THE NAGA: As you please.

*(The king of Nagas exits with his family)*

*(Narangi Raga: Kab Tal)*

Everything real here is unreal.

O son, everything else is unreal,

The only reality is

Reaching the feet of Lord Shiva.

SON: Father, you are right. It is so.

*(Speech from the second corner)*

SON : O father, never before we had such pleasure as today.

KAMBALA: O son, may you be blessed from day to day!

*(Thus ends the twenty-first Sambandh)*

*Muditakuvalayashva*, c. 17th century

Tr. by Navin Choudhary

## The Tale of Prosperity and Adversity

ANONYMOUS

*Sapata-Vipata Katha* (Sapatā-Vipatā Kathā), like various other Vrata Kathas, such as Bata Savitri Katha, Madhusravani Katha, etc., is an anonymous folk tale handed through oral tradition to successive generations. The tale concerns the calamity that befell King Nala, his queen Damayanti and son Rohidasa who had to suffer trials and tribulations for twelve long years, as a result of his incurring the wrath of Sapata and Vipata, the twin-sisters embodying Fate. The tale of their woes concludes with a happy change only when the king repents his indiscretions and bows in respect to the twin goddesses. The tale points to the moral that disrespect to Fate may entail untold woes even to the mighty and the illustrious. The narrative is couched in a prose, racy, idiomatic and rhythmical bordering, at times, on the poetical. It takes a dramatic turn when the third person narrative frequently gives way to lively dialogues. This modulation of the narrative and the dramatic gives the tale a mixed flavour and charm of its own.

It was the month of *Phalguna* (March). On the day following Phagu or Holi, a host of village ladies were listening to the tale of Sapata and Vipata with red and yellow threads twined round their left arm. Salakhi, the maid-servant, who had gone to fetch water, came and reported: "Gracious Queen, every woman listens to the tale, with the red and yellow threads twined round her arm, prays for the next son. O, could you too, listen to the tale, tie the sacred thread and pray for a son next to Rohidasa!"

At once word was sent to Patawa, the designer of threads, the sacred thread was procured and tied round the arm, the tale listened to and a son next to Rohidasa prayed for as a boon. The king came in and said, "Your arm is too full of gold to allow this red-yellow thread be there". Saying so, the king cut the thread and threw it off. The queen rose, picked up the fragments and making three-fold knots, wore it again. When the king came to have his meals, the queen served the dishes. Usually she served with her arms exposed, but that day she had them covered. Noticing the change the king remarked: "On other days you did not serve with your arms covered; why do you keep them covered today?" Again he cut it into three pieces and threw away the fragments.

While cleaning the courtyard, Salakhi discovered the discarded pieces and said, "Gracious queen, is it right to wear the sacred thread one day and throw it into the dustbin the other day?" "Fetch it to me at once", said the queen and, knotting the three fragments, wore it again.

When the king retired to bed with her at night, he detected the presence of that thread smacked of turmeric and said unto himself, "Now let me consign it to the wick of the lamp". When the queen was asleep, he untied the thread from her arm and burnt it into ashes.

Then said Sapata or Prosperity, to Vipata (Adversity): "O my sister Vipata, have not the foolish king and his consort grown proud and conceited? She wore the beneficial thread, but see, how I have been forced to sustain eight-fold burn injuries all over my body! Now, therefore, plunge them into such adversity that for twelve years they are forced to wander in the wilderness".

While the king and the queen were still asleep, Vipata or Adversity came and holding the threshold with both hands said, "Foolish king and queen, are you asleep or awake?" They replied: "We are half-asleep and half-awake, contemplating how goes the world". Vipata enquired: "What would you prefer: calamity in youth, or in old age?" The king said, "You may go away for the while, we shall tell you after due thought."

He begged for more time when Vipata called on him a second time, repeating the question. On her third visit, the king said: "One can put up with adversity while one is young, but it is difficult to do so in old age. Hence let us have adversity in youth itself."

When they awoke in the morning, they discovered to their dismay that the stable had no horse in it and the elephant-shed no elephant. Things started vanishing. Rohidasa woke up and said: "Mother, O mother, I am hungry". The queen replied: "Go and tell the store-keeper". The store-keeper found in the store nothing except some burnt remnants of fried barley. He gave it to the boy in a cloth, and Rohidasa began chewing it.

The first hair-cutting ceremony was being celebrated at the place of the king's record-keeper and the ear-boring ceremony at another officer's. The queen was asked to prepare betel and the king to make saucers of leaves. Coming back from there, the queen said; "My lord, it is bad to brook indignity and sorrow where one has ruled, nor should one rule where one is bound to suffer. Let us, therefore, seek some other place to pass our days of adversity."

So, they set out. A pillar standing in the courtyard stripped them of their garments. When they advanced further, Rama-Lakhana, the bonded servants, Salakhi, the maid-servant, the chest, the pet dog, Atmarama, the parrot, all accompanied them. On the road they saw filing past a very big marriage party of some oil merchant. All the followers of the king appealed to them:

"O great ones, if you permit us, we too may pass our days elsewhere while you are passing through this adverse phase of your life." They said: "Yes, you may; if we retrieve all, we shall retrieve you as well." So, all left them and went away.

The three then resumed their journey. On the way they came across a river which people crossed on foot. But on their approaching it, the river suddenly swelled, inundating its banks. Thereupon the queen asked, "My lord, how shall we go across the river?" The king had a golden knife with which he cut out a bundle of kusha grass and prepared a raft thereof and boarded it with Rohidasa seated in the middle, flanked by the king and the queen on either side.

Sapata told Vipata: "O sister, just see, the king and the queen seem to be enjoying a boat ride oblivious of all misery. Why not inflict on them, even now, some such calamity as they may remember for ever?" At once Vipata assumed the form of a small mouse struggling for life in the swollen river. Noticing it, the queen said: "My lord, see, the poor little mouse is on the point of drowning." The king replied: "Your infatuations have brought us to this sad plight. All right, place it on the folded plait of your 'Sari' down your waist, if you must". At once the queen fished it out and put it on the folded plait of her sari down the waist. The mouse stealthily bit the raft with the result that Rohidasa got drowned and was swallowed by a big fish. With great difficulty did the two manage to swim ashore lamenting the sad end of their dear son and proceeded further.

On their way they saw a deadly snake writhing in agony in a forest conflagration. The snake was crying aloud from there: "Ah me, had King Nala been here, he would have saved my life". Hearing it the queen said: "My lord, it is remembering only you in its agony." The king replied: "Your infatuations are responsible for our unenviable plight. Don't you see it is a snake? It will bite and I shall die." Still, King Nala soaked his head-gear in water and carved a way out for the snake. The snake came out of fire and bit Nala thrice. The king exclaimed: "Help in this degenerate age of Kali is tantamount to murder." The snake said: "No, I haven't bitten you out of spite. I have simply stripped you of your comely form and given you my ugly one instead; for, no one will give you alms in your present form."

They left the place and while they wended their way on, the queen, oppressed by hunger and thirst, enquired, "Is there none of your own in this city?" The king replied: "Oh yes, there is one, Mainadai, my sister." They came across someone through whom they sent word to her: "Your brother and sister-in-law are coming." Mainadai enquired, "What is the size of the royal entourage?" The messenger told her there was none of the kind. Guessing that it must be some luckless couple, bereft of all grace and glory, she

told her maid: "Go and let them put up in the stable. Give the man a bundle of wild grass to twist into rope and the woman a basketful of cotton seeds to disengage seeds from cotton-wool."

On the eve of the ear-boring ceremony of Mainadai's son, she had invited her daughter (as a guest). Rice, pulse and other delicacies were being prepared in abundance. Experts were engaged to prepare the endless variety of eatables as well as to make proper seating arrangements for the guests invited to the grand feast. Everything was, however, smoothly rounded off. At night, the maid-servant went to massage her with *Madhupanarayana* oil and said, "O gracious Queen, it was very unfortunate and improper to ignore the couple who, after all, came from your parental abode." Maina told her: "Go then, and tell the cook." On being told, the cook gave them the discarded remnants of rice and curry. The king told the maid-servant: "The queen would have gladly accepted even this, if Maina had served it herself." The queen enquired: "What is your name?" The maid replied, "My name is Vikan."

From *Sapata-Vipata Katha*, 17th century

Tr. by Vishwanath Jha

## The Tale of the Fast of Madhushravani

ANONYMOUS

*Madhushravani Vrata Katha* (Madhusrāvaṇī Vrata Kathā, date not known) is a series of folk tales recited during the fifteen-day-long fast observed by the newly-weds in celebration of the worship of the Serpent-Goddess Visahara in the month of Shravan (July-August), aptly described as honey-like, being the first rainy season in their married life. The object of the fast is to ensure the longevity of married life.

The tale is said to have originated in the story of a miserable mendicant girl named Madhushrava in *Shivapurana*. It is divided into fifteen episodes (called *khandas*), but often interpolations, even distantly connected with the theme of the fast, are added from village to village.

The stories of this Vrata Katha are in the nature of Sanskrit Puranas. Indeed it begins like them with the story of the creation and then passes on to the story of the marriages of Shiva and the birth of five Serpent-sisters (goddesses) as his daughters.

Then follows the covering tale of one of these sisters, Lilli. She is married to one Barasi who is apparently a simpleton, but a true man. In spite of the several tests to which Barasi's attachment to Lilli is put by his people, he remains true to his beloved. Lilli is therefore quoted again and again as wholly "soaked" in the affection of her husband and eternal in the enjoyment of married and unwidowed status.

The tale is a compendium of mythological and popular lore in medieval times. Most of them establish the values of chastity and constancy in love. Stories around Shiva's marriage and family life are taken freely from various sources, and conclusions drawn.

The first illustrative passage describes the flood and the creation of the Earth. The second relates the episode of the birth of Uma which is specially noted for its advocacy and eulogy of daughters.

I

### The Birth of the Earth

The entire Earth began quaking and getting submerged in water wiping off all topographical landmarks. The Earth refused to stabilize itself, resisting all attempts at curdling it. She exclaimed (with deep sorrow): "People humiliate me, subject me to bear their spittle and excreta; no, no, I won't stabilize or solidify".

Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesha sat in council to decide what to do. They began speculating as to who would procure a lump of clay to facilitate the curdling (of the Earth). *Rohu*<sup>1</sup> fish, the king of waters, was summoned and implored: "Please fetch from somewhere the clay that would help the Earth congeal." The fish replied, "It is impossible for me to fetch it since there is water all around."

But the trio began ardently imploring him: "You alone can do it, for you are an aquatic creature." The fish set out. At first he failed to reach the depth (of water), but at last reached the bottom, and secured the clay in his forefins, but the mighty waves washed it off by the time he came up to the surface. He told them: "It is not within my powers to fetch it." The gods, however, coaxed and entreated him once more: "You alone can render it possible." They suggested: "You should, this time, bring it in your jaws, keeping your mouth shut." He went the second time, but while returning with his mouth shut, felt suffocated and as he opened his mouth, the clay was again washed off. He was shocked and exhausted.

The gods repeated their entreaties, asserting: "You and you alone can achieve it. Let the third chance prove decisive. Please go once more and bring the clay pressed fast under your gills." He went again and, with difficulty, succeeded in bringing a bit of clay in the cavities of his gills.

1. A large Indian fresh-water kingly fish.



It was only then that the process of Earth's curdling began. The gods performed the rites of *ashvamedha yajña*<sup>1</sup> (the horse-sacrifice). Indra got apprehensive that if the sacrifice was duly completed, he might be dethroned. He, therefore, stealthily set free the sacrificial horse, (with the intention) that the Earth's tremors should not cease and she should fail to be curdled so that one of her corners remained submerged under water, which still manifests itself in the form of flood in Koshi and other rivers. At long last Indra tied the horse in the nether-world where the sage Kapila was doing penance. It led eventually to the exoneration of the sons of Sagara from their curse.

Thus the Earth stabilized itself.

## II

### The Birth of Uma

One day God summoned an assembly of gods. Sage Hemanta (Himalaya) also attended it. When the assembly was dissolved, Lord Indra got sprinkled one hundred and eight pitchers of water and an equal number of spadefuls of soil dug out where sage Hemanta had occupied his seat. Sage Narada (explaining the secret of such cleansing operations) told Sage Hemanta, "All consider you impure because you are issueless." Sage Hemanta sought to know from them: "Tell me which issue (male or female) I should be blessed with?"

Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesha enquired of him, "Would you like to have a son with seven blemishes or a daughter fulfilling (your) seven-fold heart's desire?" Narada too asked Sage Hemanta, "O uncle, which of the two would you prefer?" Hemanta replied: "I won't like to have a daughter. What is the use of having a daughter? A son would propagate my race." Narada quipped: "O! how incorrigible you are, uncle? You don't seem to realise that a son might be the cause of social scandals, whereas if you beget a daughter, you will have a son-in-law. Hence have a daughter." But Himalaya said: "I am not convinced. Go and ask Manaini (Maina)." Narada goes and asks Maina, "Uncle is a simpleton. If you get a daughter, she will celebrate *Tusari* (a month-long worship performed by unmarried maidens at the hour of dawn, beginning from the 14th of January, *Makara Sankranti*), and other festivities. It would bring you great happiness. A son, on the contrary, may bring sorrow." Maina replied, "Do as you like." Narada came back and reported to Hemanta: "Aunt (Maina) has opted for a daughter."

1. A very great act of religion importance—one which could make one attain the position of king of Gods (Indra) in heaven.

Blessings were showered and Maina conceived. Narada went away to invite all from heaven, the nether-world and the human world. First he went to the human world where he saw some people were happy, some were engaged in acquiring knowledge, others were preparing cotton wool for spinning, and the elders were busy talking. Narada got exhausted and fell down.... All came, however, when in the tenth month Uma was born.

Soon she attained marriageable age. Narada was called upon. He said, "Gracious ones, you don't seem to bother yourselves that Uma is now grown up and we ought to seek a groom for her." Narada was fed on flattened rice with curd and commissioned to seek and fetch a befitting groom for Uma.

From *Madhushravani Vrata Katha*, 17th century

Tr. by Vishvanath Jha

## Two Poems

### LOCHAN

LOCHAN (Lôcan, c.1668-1720) or Lochan Jha, is the author of *Ragatarangini* (Rāgataranṅinī) or "Waves of Melodies" which is an account of music in medieval Mithila. A high-rank poet of the Vidyapati tradition, he was well-versed in the art of music too. Two of his love-lyrics are given below.

#### 1

The season is spring, the love-god is in motion,  
Excited by the love-god, the holy maiden  
Leaving her abode, seeks you in lonely, dense gardens,  
Here, there and everywhere.

O Shyam, the maiden is quite fair,  
Yet you don't care for her,  
What I saw about her can't be described;  
Her life has become desperate.

The sandalwood, the moon, the mild fragrant air  
The pleasant peacocks' shrill cry:  
All these are death-blows to her;  
How far can she be worried?  
What is the fault  
That has obsessed you to ignore her?  
You caused all these:  
Her friends say.

Forget and forgive the fault,  
And see the maiden well.

King Narapati, the lover of Urvashi  
Is adept in the art of love,  
Thus sayeth the poet Lochan.

*Lochanak Tirhuti*, 17th-18 century

*Tr.* by Amaranath Jha

2

Rainy days have commenced  
Clouds are thick and fierce,  
My killer-spouse forgetting the appointed hour  
Has not returned yet.

Afraid of the fierce dark night  
Maids lie beside their spouses.  
But forgotten by the cruel spouse  
My life is about to close.

From *Dosar*, 17th-18th century

*Tr.* by Amaranath Jha

## The Distress of the Beloved

NANDIPATI

In the following poem by NANDIPATI (c. 1680-1716), the distress of the soul imagining itself to be deserted by God is allegorically depicted.

O Madhab, such is the day which hath come to me.  
I shall but enjoy the fruits of mine own fate,  
And what fault is that of thine?

In the city where the sandal tree is not known,  
There they plant the castor tree with honour,  
He who showeth dishonour through not understanding virtues,  
On him anger is unseemly.

If he who is void of virtues  
Blamed the man who possesses good ones  
And showed favour to a fool,

If all men praise the *Kar'mi*<sup>1</sup> leaves,  
 Are the virtues of the lotus petals less on that account?  
 If one's fixed virtues were displayed not in his presence, but elsewhere,  
 Was he therefore heedless for not perceiving them?  
 If a man remains in the darkness of mountain cleft,  
 Is the might of the sun diminished thereby?  
 Describe virtues to one who hath an intelligent mind,  
 Beasts, children and the ignorant cannot appreciate them.  
 Saith Nandipati, if a blind man looks in a mirror, what doth he see?

*Nandipatik Tirhuti*, 17th-18th century

*Tr.* by George A. Grierson

## The Deserted Beloved

RAMAPATI

The following poem by RAMAPATI (Ramāpati, 18th century) allegorically treats of the pangs experienced when the soul fancies itself deserted by God.

At first, alas, the moon-faced one heard of thy virtues from her friends,  
 And at every moment a double love for thee ariseth in her heart.

By chance, alas, the Lady saw thy moon-face,  
 And became as it were plunged in a sea of love.

Of a sudden, alas, she heareth the song of the cuckoo in the fifth scale,  
 Again and again the lovely one fainteth, as she findeth it unbearable.

Alas, the tender lotus becometh always quite burnt  
 In a moment when laid upon her bed.

If, alas, Hari, thou art pitiless, and wilt not meet her at the appointed time,  
 The maiden will not live by any means even for an instant....

Saith the wise Ramapati, hear, O Lady,  
 Be patient, and thy desires will be fulfilled by Hari.

*Ramapatik Tirhuti*, 18th century

*Tr.* by George A. Grierson

1. A plant.

## Ram on Losing Sita

SAHEB RAM DAS

SAHEB RAM DAS (18th century) was a prominent saint who wrote devotional songs on Ram and Krishna. The following poem depicts the sorrowful sentiments of Ram when Sita was carried away by Ravan.

When Raghunandan having killed Marich-deer  
Returned to the abode  
He saw Janaki missing  
And he sat down disheartened.  
He looked each moment into the nook and corner  
And queried everywhere;  
Wherefore has Janaki deserted!

Putting the head on the palms  
Raghunandan cried weeping,  
O brother Lakshman! the moon-faced spouse is missing.  
Moments and nights pass into an age:  
Saheb Das is praying for Sita.

*Saheb Ramadasak Udasi*, 18th century

*Tr.* by Amaranath Jha

## The Advent of Krishna

MANBODH

*Krishnajanma* (Kṛṣṇajanma mid-18th century) is an important narrative poem which is based on the famous Sanskrit classics *Bhagvat Purana* and *Haribans*. Apparently the theme taken up is well-known, but the poet has woven into it imaginary accounts. Therefore it has the taste of an original work.

It was written by MANBODH (c. 1744-88) in ten cantos but later on a namesake of the poet added eight cantos. The addition is, however, definitely an inferior interpolation.

The general intention of the work is well-known: the destruction of evil in the form of Kamsa, the reigning monarch of Mathura, and the restoration of good by Krishna.

The importance of the work lies in its chaste and unaffected style based on the common man's vocabulary. Another great innovation of the work was the change it brought about in the history of Maithili poetry by giving up the lyrical and erotic tradition established by Vidyapati in the 15th century and establishing

the grace of simplicity, devoid of figurative and allusive diction. Modern Maithili literature is frequently traced to its qualities and achievements.

The excerpts given below are (i) the childhood of Krishna, (ii) the plight of the milkmaids when Krishna left Gokul for Mathura, and (iii) the wrestling bouts in Kamsa's arena.

I

The Childhood of Krishna

When some days had passed gleefully, then Hari was gradually able to use his hands and feet. What place was there, where he did not go? How often did he go outside the courtyard of the house? Gleefully Lady Yashoda used to laugh, as ever and again caught up with him and brought him back from the outer doorway. She snatched fire out of his hand. How often did he burn his fingers, when she was not looking ! How often did he attempt to catch hold of snakes mistaken for ropes! How often did he eat lime mistaking it for curd! Cleverly he used to come stealthily and run away. Thus he became the worry of her life.

At length she said to him: "You must learn to obey me. Now, if you break your legs, I shall have nothing to do with you. I forbid you so many things, but you do not obey me. I have no other work to do—all my time is occupied with looking after you." Saying this she tied him up to a heavy mortar, and added: "My son, if you run away now, you won't be able to go fast." Then feeling quite safe about him, she went away, and Hari seized this opportunity, and taking the mortar in his arms again and again rolled it away. Lolling and bouncing it went to where the huge twin trees were. The Lord of Lakshmi dexterously tore up the twin Arjuna trees, without touching them with his hand. The great trees fell, and Hari expressed his jubilation. The crash made his power manifest in the world. Hearing the crash Yashoda came running. Seeing the courtyard empty, her eyes were filled with tears, and she lost all life and power. She said, "What reward has come to me after watching so much? I do not see either the mortar or the rope." Immediately afterwards she ran fast, like a milch cow that has lost her calf. She untied Hari's hands and pressing him to her heart, displayed the utmost affection and trust in him. She covered him with the corner of her garment, and carried him into the house, where her eyes poured forth water like rain-clouds. She kissed his face and gave him suck, and rejoiced with all her friends.

Says Manbodh: of my own knowledge have I described the meditations of Krishna, the child.

## II

## The Departure of Govinda

When the women of Vraja heard of the departure of Govinda, they all sat down where they were, heart-broken. Their hair were untied, and their heads uncovered, and all commenced to make lamentation. "Even in anger he never speaks a harsh word. He bears all that we say to him. Yet that Hari, he is carrying away from us: his heart is hard as if it had been rubbed with chaff. It appears that there is no other so hard-hearted as he: how, then, was he given the name Akrura (tender-hearted). We have heard that there is there in Mathura a peerless damsel, whose very feet are as beautiful as my face. Like you and me there are many, hence, what chance is there of Hari's returning?" Some in their woe abandoned their ornaments, others who had decorated themselves with lotus leaves, and flower garlands which on hearing of the departure of Hari, appeared to them like serpents. Some, broken-hearted, sat motionless, and others said, "Let us make arrangements so that he may stay here." Some stood waiting in astrologer's courtyard saying, "If you order me I will tear off my ornaments from my person, and pay you all. I will remain all my life as your menial, if, on his asking you, you will tell (Nanda) that it is an inauspicious day for going on a journey. Others said, "Why does Lord Nanda agree (to his departure), verily he is a fool, and knows nothing." "The elders in Gokul have no wisdom. God Himself and Brahma the creator are here in human forms." The whole night was spent in such speculations. When it was morn the rituals for departure began. The cowherds took up twenty two hundred loads of curd, milk and clarified butter. Lord Nanda was their chief tenant and so not one inferior pot of curd did they take. Krishna now gave up all his former love for the people and left no messages. At the time of starting he said nothing as to whether he would remain in Mathura or return. The cowherdresses said: "Let us see him fully with our eyes as long as he is here. For, what is once behind one's eyes is behind the house (as good as absent)". Saying this, they stood on a pile of dried cowdung (watching him) till the Lord had gone more than a kos or two miles. On one heap mounted four others, for how could she who was consumed by the pangs of separation remain motionless? On account of the tears from the ends of their eyes and the trampling, the piles of dry cowdung became simply a dump of wet dung. Some even went outside the village (to watch him) and others turned pale and went crazy. Hari's horses were very swift, and went like the wind. They could no longer see the chariots on account of the dust on the path raised by them and it became late in the day. Then it appeared to the hearts of all, as if a precious jewel had fallen from the hand of each. They were saying: "Every damsel of Mathura who shall see Hari will rejoice and consider her life's desire fulfilled." Saying so, they departed lamenting and calling to mind his virtues; without Hari the whole town appeared empty.

Says Manbodh, "What sort of day was that? May such one as that be for my enemies!"

### III

#### The Sport of Wrestling and the Slaughter of Kamsa

The wrestling-floor extended over a whole league in all directions, and at the idea of seeing the wrestling, the minds of even the old men got excited: "I shall also, on warming up, fight a wrestling match. There is delay in the arrival of the opposite party, here catch hold of my clothes." People had deposited their equipments at identified places, piled up heaps of excellent dry clay from the earthen granaries, here and there over the place pits had been dug for deceiving enemies, and entrapping elephants, and there were all around wooden club-sticks.

The area was extremely vast: on all sides were section upon section of canopies. There were two or three hundred multi-storeyed lofts. Here and there many items of music were being performed and maids dancing. According to the rank of those who were of chief and polite families, stands were made for them. Such a large number of people had come to see the arena that in the crowd there was hardly any vacant place to sit and watch.

Kamsa's own grand-stand was a whole league high, and it would have been very difficult to ascend into it without a ladder. Why then did Kamsa prepare so high a stand? Can any one escape from the hand of Death?

While the assembly of the people was still going on, there arose a cry of 'He's come, he's come'. In the door-way gleamed the golden diadem of Krishna, together with Nanda and the other cowherds.

The mahout struck his elephant and urged it on towards Krishna. For a while Krishna freely played with it. Then he seized the elephant's tusks, and tore them out of their sockets with his hand. With his tusk Krishna killed the elephant named Kuvalayapida. When it fell like a high mountain on the earth, Kamsa saw it, his pride got shattered. Taking the elephant's tusk as an excellent weapon in his hand Hari went forward accompanied by Balarama. Reaching the wrestling-floor, he killed the mahout, and then both of them stood proudly from a position of strength.

Thrusting several people aside, Krishna advanced and proclaimed thus in the assembly. "Chanura has exceeding might, and I am tender, it is grossly unfair that I should wrestle with him." The people of the assembly heard this and were filled with shame, but out of fear of Kamsa no one spoke.

Then Krishna, who bears the conch-shell in his hand, spoke again, considering it in his heart: "Today this unfair practice will cease for ever. I am



not a commonplace wrestler. I cannot bear it any longer. Let him who comes, come now."

Chanura came up saying: "Wait ! Let me pound you." With violent challenges he stretched his hands; he rubbed earth on his great stout arms, and appeared in no way smaller than (the proverbial) Kumbhkarna. The class of violent wrestlers is very mischievous, so for a while there was a great boxing match. One foot Krishna set before Chanura straightened and the other behind Chanura and, twisting his left knee, he set it before him. Putting their heads down close together in a posture in wrestling Krishna put forth his hand on Chanura's shoulder and several times clasped him round the neck, Krishna's arms were as strong as if he belonged to a family of elephants. Strong-armed Krishna pressed him down with one arm. "Who will tell you which trick should be used here to meet this trick of mine?" Adopting that trick Krishna warded him off, and knowing himself to be powerless against Chanura after performing it, instantly released himself. So also when Krishna seized Chanura in like manner, he reserved a counter trick. And seeing that, the hearts of good spectators became sad.

In this way, the wrestling lasted for a long time and every now and then they would walk around each other and clap their own hands in defiance.

At length Krishna gave up the manner of wrapping. Swooping on him, he struck Chanura instantaneously and felled him to the ground. Blood flowed in torrents from his mouth and nose, and the ground for about an acre became thereby a morass. Chanura, the wrestler, was crushed to pieces and he died. What life can there be to him whom Hari hath touched in anger ?

Just as Hari had slain Chanura, so did Balabhadra slay Mushtika, and like what a bird did he fly in the air in that he was able to ascend the lofty stand of Kamsa ! Upon the stand itself he hurled Kamsa down, and without letting him go, dashed himself down to the ground. Recalling his cruel heart, Krishna grew annoyed and seized him by the hair, and dragged him for some distance. Krishna thrust on him an infinitesimal portion of his weight and Kamsa immediately gave up his breath in a flash. On seeing this, Kamsa's brother named Sudama ran up challenging Him (Krishna), but, swooping down between them Balarama seized him, and laughingly treated him in the same way.

When five men had been killed, other persons were spared. The arena looked like a burial-ground.

Kamsa's wife and younger brother's wife came up, and in piteous grief rolled upon the ground. The piteous cries of all were heard and even Krishna's eyes were filled with tears. Hari consoled them, giving advice and hope, and went about with them with a long face. "I did not hope to survive and I feared that I might lose my life at the hands of Kamsa. Indeed, no one

knows what might happen. Father, you return now speedily before me. While I do not arrive there, the cows should not waste away." With these words Hari gave Nanda leave to go, and gave him ten million jewels out of Kamsa's treasury. Going a little forward, Hari and Balarama made salutation at the feet of their father and mother saying: "For so long was it impossible to honour you. I pray to you to pardon my fault."

All the members of the house of Yadus who were there made to him proper salutation. Then Krishna sent for Ugrasena and with modesty had his bonds cut. He then waved chowries over the king's throne and set the umbrella of state over Ugrasena's head.

Says Manbodh, "I have told the tale of Kamsa's slaughter. From that day all the harassments of the people in that land ended."

*Krishnajanma*, 18th century

Tr. by George A. Grierson

## Pangs of Separation

JAYANAND

In this song, by JAYANAND (Jayānand, c. 1776-1805) the grief of a soul which fancies itself deserted by God is allegorically described.

In all directions, I gaze I gaze upon the road for Hari,  
And there poureth from mine eyes a stream of tears.  
My home no longer pleaseth me night or day;  
What am I to do?

Between him and me there was not the difference of a seed,  
Our very breaths were one.  
Yet he went away pitilessly to a far country.  
What can I say of his wisdom?

How many days will this ill day remain?  
Who will tell me and explain?  
O friend, the Creator hath become opposed to me.  
Who will be my help?

Jayanand, the Karan Kayasth, sang;  
Be not mournful in thy heart.  
Patience is best of all.  
The bee will come to its home.

*Jayanandak Tiruhuti*, 18th-19th century

Tr. by George A. Grierson

# Medieval Malayalam Literature

## The Story of Rama

CHEERAMAN

*Ramacharitam* (Rāmacaritam, 12th century) is a long descriptive poetic composition consisting of 1814 stanzas, termed *pattus* or songs, arranged under 164 sections. It does not tell the whole story of Ramayana but only the part covered by 'Yuddha Kanda' (The Chapter on War). This limited scope of the work is made known in the introductory passage.

*Ramacharitam* represents the initial states of Bhakti movement in Malayalam literature. The movement flourished and spread roots among the vast majority of the lower classes. Though the author is believed by some scholars to be a Kshatriya king belonging to the ruling dynasty of Venad, he writes for enlightening the common folk, especially the soldiers and the like. According to another opinion, the poet CHEERAMAN (Cīraman, the name is a derivative of Sreerama), hailed from a low-class community in the northern region of Kerala.

The language of *Ramacharitam* is closer to Tamil than that of Manipravala literature. Most of the Sanskrit words used appear in their derivative form. This seems to have been the common practice in the *pattu* tradition.

The introductory passage (stanzas 1-11) is mainly an invocation to the gods and goddesses for their blessings to enable the poet to complete successfully the great task undertaken by him. The beauty of the diction, the cadence, the rhythmic charm, and all such understandable characteristics of inspired poetry are abound in this passage.

The passages from Sections 103, 104 and 105 describe the wailings and lamentations by the women of Lanka in general and by Mandodari, the queen, in particular, after the fall of the great Rakshasa king. The emphasis on the idea that Ravana was loved and adored by all his subjects and the innumerable women he kept in his harem is to be particularly noted. But in the lament of Mandodari, along with her great admiration for the unparalleled courage, strength, authority, and unconquerable prowess of the hero, an undercurrent of awareness of the greatness and divinity of the enemy also can be seen. The enemy is viewed as an incarnation of Vishnu. The central divinity of the Bhakti movement inspires not only the poet but the characters too.

Section 1

The following is the introductory section where the poet seeks the blessings of the gods and goddesses to tell the story of Rama (stanzas 1-11):

1

O Vinayaka, purity incarnate!  
born in the woods, of divine couple  
in playful transformation  
Hara as a tusker and the large-eyed Uma as a cow-elephant,  
thou, the elephant-faced one, thou, source-divine of all,  
thou, the embodiment of the wisdom of the Vedas,  
that fills the seven worlds,  
shower the blessings on me,  
make my lotus-heart thy throne!  
So might knowledge ineffable be mine  
to complete the task I now undertake.

2

O Goddess of poesy!  
Make the supreme enlightenment sparkle and glow within me.  
O doe-eyed one,  
place thy lotus-feet on my tongue  
and dance to thy pleasure;  
dance so that honey-sweet words surge up in my mind  
even as the waves in the ocean come one behind the other ceaselessly,  
so might I be inspired to the depths of my soul  
to tell a small part of the impeccable tale of Rama  
for the benefit of the humble and the lowly on the earth.

3

O lotus-eyed God  
reposing on the breasts of flower-born Lakshmi,  
lovely in her luxuriant flower-decked tresses,  
thou, the essence of supreme wisdom,  
rarest to be revealed  
even to the great yogis searching in the Vedas,  
thou, the master of illusion<sup>1</sup>.

1. Mayan, Vishnu

who lifted the huge mountain to hold back the torrential rains,  
 endow me with the blessings of poesy  
 to sing the glory of how as a king you once  
 destroyed the lord of the Rakshasas in battle.

4

O great God with a half-female body,  
 O destroyer of demons who annihilates  
 the pain of continued births  
 for those who meditate on the lotus-feet for ever and ever,  
 O Shiva who granted boons to Arjuna,  
 who with his unstrung bow inflicted hard blows  
 on the sacred bosom,  
 grant my wish to sing in praise the story of the conquest  
 of Ravana by the vanquisher of Madhu,  
 incarnate as king.

5

O daughter of the king of mountains!  
 whose dark heavy tresses vie with the clouds,  
 whose forehead outshines the crescent moon,  
 whose feet are worshipped by people the world over,  
 who resurrected Ananga, the one with flower-arrows,  
 when destroyed by the third eye of Hara, clad in leopard-skin,  
 take repose in my tender mind  
 and guide me along the right path in this task.

6

O pure and beauteous daughter of the oceans!  
 present in the entire universe,  
 and reposing on the jewel-decked chest  
 of the master of illusion,  
 father of Kamadeva  
 and son of the cowherd king,  
 bless me with a sidelong glance,  
 precise as a well-aimed shaft,  
 to sing in praise of the deeds of  
 the mortal hero, incarnate as king,  
 who chopped off the ten heads  
 that harassed the seven worlds.

7

Indra who annihilates the demons in battle,  
Agni, Yama, Nirrti, Varuna, Vayu, Kubera, Hara,  
the cool moon, the hot sun,  
the king of serpents,  
Earth, the beautiful mother-goddess,  
Aja, and all other gods,  
and the goddess who vanquished the demon Mahisha,  
and the fierce goddess Bhairavi, born of the fiery eye of Shiva,  
and the six-faced god and the flower-arrowed Kama:  
may every one shower blessings on me!

8

The wisest and the noblest will bless me,  
for they will think "this humble helpless one deserves blessings",  
the worthless may not turn into enemies and may ignore,  
for they will think "he will never succeed",  
the equals and the friends will not quarrel,  
should they find me erring now and then in this verbal art;  
thus encouraged, I take this venture,  
this task of describing the war of wars  
waged by sapphire-coloured god,  
incarnate as man, against the Rakshasas.

9

May I be blessed with the gift of genius  
by Valmiki, the first of poets,  
then Vyasa, the good Agastia, scholar in the Vedas,  
and the sage who composed honey-sweet verses in Tamil<sup>1</sup>  
to describe the wonderful deeds  
of one who, in response to the distress calls of gods,  
took birth as the son of Dasaratha,  
to redeem Sita, the daughter of the ocean.

10

When the king of the Rakshasas kidnapped the ocean-born goddess,  
before the rainy season came

1. Perhaps, a reference to Nammalvar.

and Rama went about searching for her,  
 the king of monkeys gave orders to the vanaras:<sup>1</sup>  
 "Run, right now, and search in all regions",  
 they went in all directions and up and down; Hanuman, with an  
 unimpaired mind,  
 jumped over the turbulent sea and crossed it.  
 That night in Lanka, the agony and anxiety Hanuman had,  
 searching for the long-eyed Mythili:  
 it is difficult for me to describe it all.

## 11

The anxiety gave place to joy  
 when in the end he found her;  
 he gave the ring to the long-eyed one,  
 and received the crest-jewel that adorned her lustrous locks.  
 Then he prostrated before her and bade farewell,  
 forthwith crossed the sea back, and reached the opposite shore.  
 The vanaras surrounding him,  
 he saluted the lord of the worlds  
 and in words as refreshing as pure milk  
 recounted the story of Mythili.

## Section 103

The following extract describes the death of Ravana and the lamentations of his women:

## 1

The huge body of the lord of Rakshasas  
 lay there on the ground, a blue mountain:  
 a spectacle gratifying to Indra, lord of the gods.  
 It burned the hearts of the sweet-tongued consorts of the dead hero;  
 they burst into loud lamentation.

## 2

Wailing and weeping, some fell on his knees,  
 some of the doe-eyed ones kissed his adored feet,  
 some embraced his mighty muscular hands,  
 and some his shapely legs and thighs,  
 some kissed his lotus-hued cheeks  
 and some fondled his majestic bow.

---

1. Monkeys.

3

The ten heads appeared as peaks of Mount Meru,  
Some of the women caressed one face on their laps,  
some others another face;  
they bathed the heroic faces in a flood of tears.

4

Some fell across and fondled the faces again and again,  
embraced the body bewailing,  
and went on recounting one by one  
his heroic deeds of yesteryears.

5

They stroked their bedecked breasts and faces,  
fell around him, their melting hearts ablaze,  
started recalling amidst wailing  
how he conquered the fourteen worlds,  
how in fierce fight the blood of enemy warriors  
adorned the victorious hero's bosom.

6

Oh lord! the mightiest of the mighty,  
who did this to you? Split your figure!  
Have you really left us?  
Have all your amorous sports with us ended for ever?  
Sweetest of the sweet to the devoted!  
The way you lie here on the battlefield  
will indeed relieve those you subdued.

7

Oh lord of Lanka! you shattered enemies as the sun the darkness.  
You were the source of strength for all;  
you were the *kalpaka*<sup>1</sup> to the solicitous.  
Who is here to protect us and this orphaned land?  
Why did you leave us in desolation?  
How could you desert this grand city  
and choose the city of the god of death?

1. Tree of Paradise that grants all wishes.



## 8

We would follow you, but the route we know not.  
 Pierced by enemy's arrows,  
 and body slowly giving in,  
 which destination you slipped off to, we know not.  
 There we yearn to join you, leaving here for ever.  
 When is that happy moment:  
 this is our only concern.

## 9

Cursed to see your shattered body thus,  
 not for a moment more do we wish to breathe on this earth.  
 Your wealth, palace, wives, worthy sons and army  
 all destroyed; retribution indeed;  
 the sages were so distressed.

## 10

"Renowned leader of Rakshasas! Is it that  
 you marched off with your army to fight the god of death  
 leaving your body here?" thus lamented  
 the disconsolate ladies. Then came Mandodari,  
 the exquisite beauty, and fell on his chest.

## 11

On that body, the embodiment of supreme masculine charm,  
 deranged from grief, she fell;  
 tears rolling down, screaming, she rolled on the dust,  
 embraced his body and wailed,  
 thought of her past life with him and wept.

## Section 104

The following is Mandodari's lament on the death of her husband Ravana  
 (stanzas 1-11):

## 1

Where have you gone O dauntless one, leaving here your body shattered,  
 leaving your loved ones, wealth, city, palace and friends,

leaving all of us in the never-ending misery caused by war,  
where have you gone, O enemy of the gods?

2

In the midst of the relentless war  
incessantly giving strain to the enemy  
how can you leave? It suits you not; come on, get up,  
smile again, shake off anger and  
look at me all over, let the stony stiffness  
melt in me. Never before have you been undone by enemy  
nor your prowess overthrown.

3

A minor slip, of late? Still this stiffness  
towards enchanting damsels is unlike you.  
Be kind to me, don't you see me begging at your feet?  
Won't you speak just one word to me?  
How can you choose to sleep in the mud  
as the lowest of the low, my lord?

4

My lord! King of kings! Vanquisher of enemies!  
Not one but thousands were your enemies  
who brought your body to this state.  
The death of thunder-voiced Thataka had foretold this.  
From then onwards, obsessed I was  
with a foreboding of this ultimate fate.

5

Her son lost no time in seeking fight to wreak vengeance  
and lost his life; Maricha resorted to deceitful stratagem  
foolishly, and he too was killed.  
Several were the mistakes committed thereafter.  
But Oh! lord of the Rakshasa chiefs,  
the ultimate destiny makes no mistake.

6

One slender arrow sufficed  
to end the life of the king of vanaras;

a single vanara coming here alone sufficed  
 to inflame our sorrows. Who could forget these?  
 Our worries multiplied day by day, and I begged of you,  
 Exhorted in all vehemence for a wiser course,  
 till the obsessive pride grew incurable.

7

"Honey-tongued is that goddess Sita": these words of your sister  
 took you to the encounter;  
 the enemy's strength you underestimated.  
 All virtues and abiding charms, don't you see,  
 abound in our women?  
 None I know as her, whose virtues mean doom to our race.

8

In wisdom and beauty excelling are our women;  
 in charm of complexion none to surpass them;  
 in their devotion to you, sincerest they are;  
 in affection and sensuous graces unequal too.  
 What perfection you found in Sita, my lord,  
 so great to melt away your strength?

9

My lord, thou art kalpaka to the solicitous;  
 tell me, what fascination you found in her?  
 In beauty, nobility and wisdom what excellence,  
 unknown to me, you spotted in her?  
 Was it not a misplaced infatuation?  
 Was not your mind wayward and foolish?  
 My lord, human lives  
 are but mere bubbles that the rains bring forth.

10

Those good old days! even Indra's thunderbolt  
 failed to strike a fatal blow then.  
 Fighting only increased your might and strength.  
 But now the arrows have done the impossible.  
 The body is pierced; how the blood flows!

Why did you seek an end like this?  
Why did you choose to break our togetherness?

11

Lord, these women and I will force you to speak words of nectar,  
you who are now lying on the battle-ground in full splendour.  
Lord, you will wake and rise when from our lotus -eyes  
unending tears roll down in heart-rending grief.  
When we utter words of heavenly truth,  
then, my lord, you won't rest in silence.

### Section 105

This is a continuation of the preceding section:

1

My lord! has your mind become so lost in Mythili  
that the oneness we once knew is now forgotten?  
Am I not mother of Indrajit? Why is it that  
you now slight this status of mine?

2

See how the sun is under clouds.  
Most befitting to the mourning in Lanka,  
his worthy powerful rays are covered  
to give you shade, O mighty lord of Lanka,  
wake up at my call.

3

My words do not ruffle your peace?  
To whom else do I have to unburden this heavy agony?  
Slowly moving away from me, have you  
joined the celestial beauties?

4

Never live for a moment separated from you:  
that was my determination and hope.

All this uprooted, what am I to do?  
Am I to linger in the world with the burden of unending grief?

## 5

Impossible it is for me to live separated from you.  
Be kind and take my hand in yours,  
lead me step by step to the abode of the lord of death.  
Having succumbed so lightly to Rama's arrows  
obliged you are to deem this your duty.

## 6

Even Indra, the mightiest of the mighty,  
dared not ever face you in battle.  
But now, lord of ocean-bounded Lanka,  
the hero of Manus caused your downfall!  
Shouldn't such an end befit me as well?

## 7

Oh! incarnation of masculine charm,  
wearing suitable adornments matching your grandeur,  
how I used to ride in our Pushpaka  
and see various places! All this ended for ever.  
How to endure this unbearable loneliness?

## 8

Annihilation of Rakshasa race flashed through my mind  
as a foreboding, the minute they  
built the causeway and crossed the sea  
and lord of Lakshmi, the lotus-born, came for the fight.

## 9

He who redeemed the Vedas incarnate as a fish!  
He who lifted mount Manthara  
on his back incarnate as a tortoise!  
Did you take him to be a mere human, come to offend?  
Didn't you realise the truth?

## 10

Aja and Indra, Isa and the gods,  
all together went to the destroyer of Madhu.

"Untold misery is caused  
to the world by the Rakshasas",  
so they complained.  
Incarnation he took as a king  
in compliance with their wishes.

11

Knowing that he was born  
as a king, the gods took birth as monkeys;  
and Lakshmi, the goddess of beauty,  
appeared as Mythili.

From *Ramacharitam*, 12 century

Tr. by M. Leelavathy

## The Art of the Courtesan

ANONYMOUS

*Vaishikatantram* (Vaiśikatantram, c. 13th century) is the first major work in early Manipravalam. It consists of 266 quatrains in Sanskrit metre. The heroine Anangasena is being briefed by her mother in the profession of a courtesan or *devadasi*. Each generation handed down its code of conduct and style of life to its successors. Of the four main objects of life, the courtesan is to follow the path of *kama* or sensual life and make her fortune during her youth itself. The poem is modelled on the pattern of *Kuttanimata* in Sanskrit by Damodara Gupta.

A few excerpts from the work ( stanzas 1-2 and 15-24 ) are given below:

I shall instruct you in lessons heirarchic  
Passed on to me by my grandma, who had them from her grandma,  
Who had received them from her grandma of the fourth  
generation preceding.  
Leaving out none of them I shall  
Teach you all in the order of the Gurus. (1)

The great grandma advised my grandma in secrecy;  
she in turn transferred them to my mother,  
Who practised them and narrated  
The same art to me. I shall  
Disclose them to you in the order of the Gurus. (2)

Darling, with a voice sweet as the *veena* and the cuckoo!  
Womenfolk should amass as much wealth as possible

From their lovers when their youth is fresh;  
Thereafter they may live on  
Only with their fallen breasts. (15)

For a damsel with a rich bosom,  
Luxuriant hair, a sweet face  
And radiant teeth flashing a smile,  
The pursuit of wealth is the real pursuit;  
Yet for that pursuit to bear fruit,  
Grandma's eyes should keep a watch. (16)

With your eyes blackened and forehead adorned,  
After offering flowers to God,  
Wearing ornaments and chewing betel leaves,  
Go forth, with your maids,  
To face your crowded lovers with grace. (17)

At the parlour you smile at one of them;  
Accost another with a twist of your eyebrows, my daughter;  
Greet the third with a lowering of the brow;  
Welcome all others with your glances. (18)

Inside the parlour, O pretty one!  
Smile at one, flicker the eyebrows at another,  
Cast a sidelong glance at one, and nod at the others;  
keep the world of lovers thus entertained. (19)

Inside the parlour  
Enchant everyone with the corners of your eyes,  
Making each of them feel you glance at him,  
Hovering like bees over a myriad lotuses. (20)

Inside the parlour, O pretty one,  
With your versatile art of entertainment,  
Rouse desire in the mind of each,  
And perform to suit their varied whims,  
So that they come again, once having gone. (21)  
Treat the visiting travellers with civility;  
Share pleasing secrecies with the lovers;  
Entertain the poets with betel leaves;  
Bow before the Brahmins; humour the lustful;

Try to allure the high-born;  
Entice the family men;  
And blatantly flatter the capricious. (22)

Grasp those who are sincere in love;  
Ensnare the noble ones with a show of affection;  
Win over the poets with a display of passion;  
Give food and clothes to maids;  
Respect greatly the man useful in future;  
Take you my counsel, my daughter. (23)

Charm the celibate ones with words, the friends with smiles,  
The dependants with gifts,  
The family men with affected indignation,  
The lovers with bewitching glances,  
The foolish ones with tears of joy,  
The king with enticing charms;  
The sensualists with tact;  
The noble ones with a magic potion,  
The poets by lending your ears to their verses,  
And your own relations in other ways. (24)

From *Vaishikatantram*, 13th century

Tr. by P. Narayana Kurup

## The Tale of Unniyachi

TEVAN CHIRIKUMAN

*Unniyachicharitam* (Unniyaccicaritam, 13th century) is supposed to have been written by Tevan Chirikuman. The poem begins with a salutation to Lord Shiva of Thiruchilari ruled by the king of Purakkilanad. This is followed by a description of Vishnu and that of the place Tirumaruttur, where Unniyachi lived.

During the annual festival at the temple a celestial singer (Gandharva) happened to see Unniyachi and was enamoured of her glowing beauty. He assumed a human shape and wooed her. His loud praise of her beauty was heard by a youth standing nearby, who requested the Gandharva to say more about his object of adoration. The Gandharva then narrated the story of Unniyachi— how a celestial girl once gave birth to the mother of Unniyachi— and described in exalted terms the physical charm of Unniyachi. The Gandharva watched the whole-night festival and at dawn came down to the house of Unniyachi after worshipping at the temple. He saw there many foolish lovers trying to get a glimpse of Unniyachi. As the ultimate bliss of his life, he finally saw her. Revelling in a fabulous description of Unniyachi, the poet concludes the work with a salutation to Goddess Bhadrakali at Palancheri temple.



The following lines describe the heroine:

Is it the flow of liquid sandal?  
 Or is it the radiance of moonlight?  
 Is collyrium being applied  
 To the eyes of one who delights in dalliance  
 In the light of the lamp  
 Lit at dusk with camphor?  
 Has the god of love created a stream  
 With sweet and cool droplets  
 Of water from all ponds and fields  
 To alleviate the pain caused by  
 The scorching fire directed at him  
 By Shiva, the three-eyed lord?  
 And has he immersed my eyes too  
 In that stream?

I have the gods of medicine in consultation  
 Sent Ashwini Devas, the twin deities, to save mankind  
 By creating the essence of all medicines  
 In the form of a maiden sweet?  
 Are my eyes in a state of bliss?

He rejoiced as he saw clearly with both eyes.  
 Her feet are the glowing tender leaves,  
 Grown on the creeper called love  
 Planted and nurtured by the goddess of love.  
 In the ocean of beauty  
 Shine her toes like corals;  
 Her nails are pearls  
 Born out of the dorsal feet, the shells.

From her anklets so dazzling  
 Arise the pair of columns  
 In full rounded shape, her thighs,  
 Stopped by the knees looking like bubbles.

Her posterior, round and fair  
 Like the palm of the god of love,  
 Clearly marked with the three curves,  
 Her slender waist is a stalk of lotus  
 Held down as an offering to the love-god;

And the bees which come to the lotus  
 Form a dark row of hair from the navel.  
 Small is her belly, like Agastya<sup>1</sup>,  
 Given birth to by the golden pot, full round,  
 Which forms her bosom,  
 Smeared with the paste of aloewood and kumkum

Her neck is conch-like; her serpentine arms  
 Move like flowery branches;  
 Her face like the early autumnal moon of youth;  
 Her smile so captivating  
 As the rays of the *Kaustubha* jewel,  
 Worn on Lord Vishnu's breast;  
 Or the lotus sportively held by Goddess Lakshmi  
 Who resides at the bosom of Lord Vishnu.

Her words are apt to sweeten our hearts,  
 And then to leave us desperate.  
 Her nose reminds one of a female parrot  
 Or a sesame flower;  
 Her cheeks are like the mirror  
 Held by the Goddess of Love in her dance.  
 Her ears are the deeps gathering the sweat of passion  
 And her eyebrows form waves thereof.

From *Unniyachicharitam*, 13th century

Tr. by P. Narayana Kurup

## The Tale of Unnichirutevi

ANONYMOUS

*Unnichirutevicharitam* (Unṇicirutēvīcaritam, 13th century) is ascribed to a Nampootiri belonging to Chovvara, whose name is not known. The poem begins with an invocation to Lord Shiva and proceeds to describe the village Chovvara and the Krishna temple at Poyilam. Danceuse Unnichirutevi resides here in the house Tottuvaypilli.

Indra chances to overhear a compliment paid by a poet to Unnichirutevi and wanted to hear more about her, and about the other danceuses in the house. This is followed by a lengthy description of the charms of Unnichirutevi. Her residence and neighbourhood too are described in great detail with sarcastic references to the idle folk assembling at the vicinity, much to the delight of Indra.

1. Saint Agastya was born out of a pot; he was short in stature.

Three excerpts from the work are given below:

1

The following is a description of *Ardhanariswara*—Shiva and Parvati, the androgynous deity.

With attending maids on the left  
 And Bhootas on the right;  
 A golden anklet on one foot soft,  
 A twining serpent on the other;  
 One half attired with a leopard skin,  
 The other half with a piece of cloth;  
 A darling parrot in one hand,  
 And mystic gesture on the other;  
 A glow of kumkum on one side,  
 [And a different hue on the other];  
 A gem-studded earring in one ear,  
 And a serpent in the other;  
 Her sweet melody, and his resounding voice,  
 Merge into one in perfect harmony;  
 One eye fish-like and painted black,  
 The other brown like that of a deer;  
 The hair perfumed and bedecked on one side,  
 Matted, with a crescent moon on the other;  
 The body green on one side,  
 Reddish on the other;  
 The left side for Uma,  
 and the right side for himself;  
 This iridescent form,  
 The saviour of all who pray to him:  
 That *Dakshinamurti* stays there,  
 Always in full glee.

2

The following is a description of the place called Poyilam:

Delicate creepers in the newly-blossomed gardens,  
 The pollen that comes out of the flowers of the creepers, \*  
 The betel climbers twining around arecanut palms,  
 The slender-waisted maidens coming to water the creepers

The respected ones devoted to noble work,  
 The footprints of horses high,  
 The gaps in the woods made by the deer, running in fright,  
 The rivers where brides bathe and play,  
 The tuskers and their mates revelling in lotus ponds,  
 The boars with their rough paws,  
 The lustful ones, noblemen and danceuses:  
 All these are there in the place called Poyilam.

3

The following is a description of heroine Unnichirutevi:

There was born to her a lovely daughter,  
 A diamond locket on a necklace;  
 Like the celebrated Mahalakshmi to the ocean of milk,  
 Knowledge absolute, the ultimate bliss,  
 Born of the Sea of Nectar.  
 Even a Valmiki would find it hard to describe her gifts:  
 Out of my own foolish fancy, I dare to praise her.

If I say her feet are like the red lotus,  
 Other red buds will forsake me.  
 If I compare the back of her feet to the outer petals of a lotus,  
 Will the tortoise show a wry face?  
 If I say her ankle is like the screwpine flower,  
 The necks of peacocks may complain.  
 If the thighs are likened to golden pillars,  
 Will not the banana stem get upset?  
 If the blessed loins are said to resemble a sand-bank,  
 The love-god's chariot will be jealous.  
 If I compare her belly to a banyan leaf,  
 Alas! what will be the palm of a hand feel?  
 And if her waist is compared to a lightning's curve,  
 Will not the flag of the god of love get worried?  
 If I say her bosoms are like cassia buds,  
 Green coconuts may protest.  
 If her hands are said to be like heavenly climbers,  
 The *champaka* garland will be annoyed with me.  
 If I say her neck is like a shapely conch,  
 The golden jug will get irritated.  
 If her face is said to be like a lotus,  
 Will not the full moon be vengeful?

If her mouth is compared to the red fruit of *kova*,  
 The ruby will be angry.  
 If I liken the glitter of her teeth to the moonlight,  
 The jasmine buds will cry in despair.  
 If her graceful nose is likened to a bird's beak,  
 The sesame flower will quarrel with me.  
 If I say her cheeks are like mirrors,  
 The moon in the tenth phase will feel sad,  
 If I say that the eyes, dark and pointed,  
 Stretching from one ear to the other,  
 With curved eyelids,  
 Form a poetic couplet,  
 And are like bluish lily;  
 Will not the sea-fish take it as a disgrace?  
 If I say that the eyebrows are  
 Like riverine ripples,  
 Or better, like the bow of the god of love,  
 And that the forehead is broad like the half-moon,  
 The adorned deck of the god of love has a better claim.  
 If her tresses are likened to black algae  
 Will not the rain-clouds drown themselves?  
 To describe even a part of her body,  
 A single simile is insufficient; and so  
 Let me conclude this eulogy here:

She was an ornament to all brides,  
 Whose faces shed rays of nectar on our eyes;  
 This bride thus described in this poem  
 Is Unnichirutevi.

From *Unnichirutevicharitam*, 13th century

Tr. by P. Narayana Kurup

## The Tale of Unniyati

EVOOR DAMODARA CHAKYAR

Written by EVOOR DAMODARA CHAKYAR (Evūr Dāmōdara Cākyār, 14th century)  
*Unniyaticharitam* (Uṇṇyāṭicaritam) is a poem in praise of Unniyati, a beautiful  
 courtesan at Kantiyur temple. Her family house is Cherukāra and many *devadasis*  
 from this house had been the wives of Maharajas. Unniyati married Rama Varma  
 from the Perumpatappu royal family.

The poem begins with the story of Unniyati in her former birth, as a celestial girl who attracted the Moon god. There is a vivid description of the western Ghat's and the life of celestial beings, along with a colourful description of the Earth, with particular reference to Mahodayapuram and Odanad, where the story takes place. There is a long description of Lord Shiva at Kantiyur temple. Messengers from the Moon god happen to see a scholar at this temple reciting a poem about Unniyati. Thrilled by this description, the messengers long to see such a heroine and the scholar offers to take them to the house of Unniyati. On the way he continues his narration and his enchanting account of her beauty. The friends arrive at the central hall of the house where Unniyati sits in all pomp and glory. The poem concludes with the description of this vision.

The passage given below is a description of Lord Shiva followed by that of Mahodayapuram:

The Lord who decorates his matted hair,  
 More luxuriant than a sheaf of corn,  
 With the crescent moon, with river Ganga,  
 With fresh flowers of wild balsam,  
 With a skull and a horde of serpents,  
 And with fresh buds of cassia,  
 He who burnt to ashes the god of love  
 With the blazing fire from his forehead;  
 That all-powerful one  
 With his three eyes, the Moon and Fire and the Sun,  
 With snakes for earrings  
 Whose venom-filled neck is fondled by Parvati,  
 The daughter of the Himalayas,  
 That Lord of mountains,  
 Whose chest bears the mark of liquid *kumkum*  
 From the large bosom of the mountain's daughter.  
 Who is decked with serpents, skull and ashes,  
 Who carries a deer, an axe and a spear in his hands,  
 The spear which overpowered the God of Death:  
 He who carries a pretty drum and burning flame,  
 With gestures of benediction and protection,  
 With many other things in his hands, sturdy like flagmasts,  
 Who wears the skin of an elephant at his loins,  
 Who has two serpents for anklets,  
 The lord of all the seven worlds,  
 The destroyer of the triple cities,  
 The primal God, dear to the three worlds,

Worshipped by the sages,  
 The supreme lord and the lord of Parvati;  
 He dwells at this place  
 Renowned as the *Kailasa* of the South.  
 Where there flows the Choomi,  
 As the river celestial flows beside Hastinapur,  
 Where the ocean's wavy hands  
 Sprinkle lustrous pearls;  
 Where handsome youths are hit by  
 Darts of sharp glances from damsels,  
 Where clear-headed priests securely dwell  
 In courtyards surrounded by walls high enough to touch the moon,  
 Where river Nanti reddened by the rich lotus  
 Gives the appearance of twilight glow.  
 Where tall mansions are lustrous  
 Like Mount Mandara,  
 Where young girls playing with balls  
 Cause jealousy to the restless celestial maidens,  
 Where bees hum tasting the secretion of elephants in rut,  
 Where on tree-tops, with the humming sound of male moths  
 Stays the black Goddess Mahakali.  
 Where youngsters in varied moods  
 Sing passionately like Sage Narada,  
 Here stays He, the cause of all,  
 My lord, hailed in the Vedas,  
 The God of Tiruvanchikulam.  
 Here is the famous Mahodayapuram  
 Surrounded by myriad coconut palms,  
 The seat of Kerala's rulers.

In this hilly spot, rivulets born at hill-tops  
 Flow down to form continual cataracts.  
 Where the deers drink from the stream without bowing their heads  
 And chew the thick grass of the valley,  
 Enjoying the cool mountain breeze blowing gently,  
 Listening to the lovely woodland maidens sing softly  
 And go to sleep  
 Leaning their heads on the necks of their mates  
 With eyes closed in bliss,  
 And wake up with a start

When the tender grass in their mouths slips down,  
And, freed from the fear of tigers,  
Again drink the nectar of stream water  
To slip into beautiful slumber.

From *Unniyatcharitam*, 14th century

Tr. by P. Narayana Kurup

## Message to Unnuneeli

ANONYMOUS

Written in Manipravala style on the model of Kalidasa's *Meghdoot*, *Unnuneelisan-desham* (Unnunilisan-desam, c. 1350) is a long poem of about 240 verses in the Sanskrit metre *mandakranta* and is about a courtesan named Unnuneeli, separated from her lover by a nymph. The lover was removed from Katuthuruthi to a distant place, Thiruvananthapuram. He happened to see Prince Aditya Varma of Venad who had come to worship at the nearby temple of Shri Padmanabha. The separated lover described his pitiable plight and requested the prince to act as a messenger to convey news about him to his beloved lady. He then describes the route to be taken in the journey. The poem is replete with sensuous pictures of nature, but the women at any of the places are more important to the poet than the place itself. The poem does not seem to have any serious purpose; an occasional charm of ingenious word-picture, pleasing conceits and metaphors being its special grace. The latter half of the poem contains a description of the heroine and the mode of delivering the message. A few quatrains from each of the two parts are given below:

### Part I

The following stanzas describe the lady and her lover in separation and the lover's meeting with the messenger:

A crown for the dames with flowing bee-dark locks,  
Unnuneeli at her house Muntakkal,  
Prosperous as goddess Lakshmi's own abode,  
Had her sportive time with her sweet paramour  
Who, being enamoured of her, kissed her ruby lips. (1)

Deep in slumber he was, carrying over his bosom,  
His beloved tired in the game of love,  
When a bewitching nymph, in amorous madness,  
Took him away to the south.  
Like the Demoness Surupanakha carrying away Lakshmana. (2)



Hovering over the city of Syanandur  
 The paramour woke up, alone and sad,  
 His heart heavy with despair, but he  
 Saved himself from the magic spell. (3)

Near where Lord Padmanabha was with Lakshmi  
 Alighted he and squatted down  
 To bemoan his separation from his beloved;  
 He felt like fire the breeze wafting the jasmine scent. (4)

"O Mother! what place is this?" he wondered;  
 What direction it was, his heart lamented,  
 When the temple folks sang: "Lord Padmanabha, Murari!  
 Let your eyes be opened to bless this universe!" (5)

Cocks bugled like the very trumpet of love-god;  
 Groups of stars were seen strewn like grains;  
 The sun and moon shone bright,  
 Keeping the rhythm for Dawn, the danceuse;  
 And like a chain came out the bees  
 From the lotus buds unfolding. (6)

The sun, a crown of gems over the blue mountain,  
 The moon, all but one-fourth sunk in the ocean,  
 O Lord, who reclines on the bosom of Goddess Lakshmi,  
 Listen to this song as the morning sun strikes the head. (7)

While he consoled himself hearing all these,  
 The cooing of the cuckoos was heard in the grove;  
 And Spring, the executioner, arrived with the god of love,  
 Wafted by the echoes of the humming bees. (8)

In the mango grove were the cuckoos,  
 In the jack trees swarms of bees;  
 In the thickets where *champaka* bloomed  
 Were the sharp arrows of love-god;  
 In *bakula* swayed the soft breeze;  
 In *kimsuka* were its own flowers; in the ponds the lotuses:  
 Where could he now turn for help? (9)

Through the garden strewn with drops of snow  
 Like splinters of fire,  
 Born as it were of the pangs of chakravaka birds  
 Came the gentle breeze spraying the nectar of poison

From the half-opened lotus and killed him. (10)

Aditya Varma, the heroic prince of Trippappur,  
A spell of charm to lovely maidens,  
A spell of death to foes,  
A spell of delight to men of learning,  
Appeared before him like the elixir of life  
And brought him back to life. (11)

He looked at the virtuous prince,  
That sea of benevolence,  
A love-god to damsels of dark tresses,  
Embraced lovingly by Goddesses of wealth and knowledge,  
A flag of victory over the wicked,  
And the fire of destruction of enemies. (12)

Seeing that prince beside like the heroic moon,  
He melted like the moon-stone, smiled like the water lily  
And hummed like a hive of bees;  
He swelled like a sea, rejoiced like a Chakravaka  
Drinking in the nectar of beauty;  
Excited he was like the god of love. (13)

*Part II*

The following stanzas describe the heroine Unnuneeli:

Behold there my graceful one,  
A maid to Goddess Lakshmi,  
A garland for maidens to adorn their crests,  
A lake of nectar on this earth,  
A foundation for love-god's renown,  
Pleasing to the eyes as camphor  
And a fertile field to my love. (47)

Her tresses vie with the sapphire blue of the sky;  
Her glances vie with the eyes of the sprightly doe;  
Auspicious is the house Muntakkal where she lives;  
Unnuneeli is the moonlight over the lotus pond of women. (48)

Soft and gentle is the movement of the swan;  
She teaches it by her gait.  
My dear one's feet  
Surpass the half-opened lotus buds

That adorn the locks of other women. (49)

Bright red like the inner petals of the lotus  
Are the toes of my beloved;  
And her nails put to the shade the brightness of pearls;  
The back of her feet excels the shapely curve of the tortoise;  
And the neck of the peacock bows to my beloved's ankles. (50)

The mirror-casket of the god of love  
Is no equal to her kneecap;  
Her shapely thighs far excel  
The grace of an elephant's trunk;  
Impossible is it for me to describe her posterior,  
The unexcelled kingdom of the god of love;  
The ultimate bliss of all my fortune. (51)

Slender her waist; her navel pretty like *bakula* flower;  
Her abdominal hair, like the shadow of her lustrous locks;  
The threefold curves like waves in the Ganga of beauty;  
And her belly, like the palm of the god of love. (52)

High are her breasts, making her stoop a bit,  
As if her waist would break under their weight;  
Tender like banana seedlings  
Are her shapely hands;  
Weary is her conch-shaped neck  
Bearing the burden of her dark tresses;  
The lips of the moon-faced lady  
Are beauteous like the *bimba* fruit. (53)

Her words are sweeter than honey;  
And her smile is like the moonlight.  
Charming are her teeth;  
Her cheeks like crystals of sapphire;  
Her eyes, long enough to touch her ears,  
Surpass the glances of does;  
Her earlobes are like the golden swings of Goddess Lakshmi. (54)

Her shapely nose  
Tries to capture the beauty of the sesame flower;  
Set like bows are her lively eyebrows wavy;  
Gracefully bright like a crescent moon is her forehead;  
When compared, the lotus face of my beloved  
Brings blemish to the full moon. (55)

O, my noble handsome friend,  
The beauty of the thick blue rain-clouds  
Will bow before the dark tresses of doe-eyed Unnunceli,  
Who sheds lustre at Muntakkal house. (56)

Her blue eyes, longer than a span,  
And her shy hesitant lisping speech,  
Are more captivating the more one sees;  
She is a bliss to lovers, and a festival to the god of love;  
A blessed abode to Goddess Lakshmi:  
I just can't describe the charms of that lovely lady. (57)

Separated from me for the first time  
She may be like a lotus pond ravaged by the winter.  
The doe-eyed one, the garland of all women,  
May be so transformed now, her former lustre lost:  
How can the pond of water lilies be the same, bereft of the moon? (58)

Her dark locks unkempt for long may now be tangled;  
Her *bimba*-red lips, withered by her frequent sighs,  
May have taken on the blue of her eye;  
And her eyes by the incessant flow of tears  
May have taken on the red of her *bimba*-like lips. (59)

The eyebrows of my blessed one  
May have forgotten their graces  
And may be slumbering like hungry bees  
When the honey of the lotus flowers is exhausted.  
Her cheeks, grown pale in the supporting hands, may have  
The faded glow of the moon in his tenth phase,  
Seen in the day-sky. (60)

Like crystal caskets set with blue gems  
Her beautiful breasts at war with each other  
Wearing nail marks, soft and lovely,  
And lines left by flowing tears,  
Resemble ripe mangoes with marks of flowing sap (61)

Her shapely pair of thighs, with beads of sweet  
And soft nail marks  
and fondled by my hands  
At the end of the game of love in reverse,  
May be pale like ivory pillars. (62)

Even in this form, my noble friend,  
 You can identify my dear one;  
 The lotus-eyed and sweet-voiced one,  
 Though, emaciated day by day in the dark phase,  
 Will anyone fail to identify the eastern crescent moon? (63)

From *Unnuneelisandesham*, 14th century

Tr: by P. Narayana Kurup

## Cheriyachi

ANONYMOUS

*Cheriyachi* (Ceriacci, 14th-15th century) is a poem of anonymous authorship. It is about Cheriyachi, a courtesan of Udayapuri. The poet happens to be separated from her. The 26 stanzas given below describe the lover's feelings, as he sees the moon rise in the evening. The heroine's name is repeated in each stanza.

Twilight brings a warrant from the Love-God,  
 With stars for letters, sky for paper, and moon for signature,  
 That I may be put to death tonight,  
 O Cheriyachi, through separation from you. (122)

As it suits the forsaken, O Cheriyachi,  
 The moon spreads the tender leaves of western sky,  
 Like a bed for me at the start of night,  
 Scattering flowers of moonlight over it. (123)

O my Cheriyachi, to kill me the love-lorn,  
 The God of Love in the guise of the moon  
 Has set his holy arrow, red with the blood of wayfarers  
 To the sacred bow of the eastern hill (124)

This dusk, O Cheriyachi, like a magician  
 Goes about begging, wearing beads of stars,  
 And burning the incense of black darkness  
 In the fire of the evening. (125)

The night applies rose water and the sandal paste  
 Of moonlight when the sun, her lover, departs;  
 The same is true of the lotus pond, I see.  
 I am worried about your news, O Cheriyachi! (126)

In a glowing pink dusk rises the moon in full  
The sun's disc sets in a similar way;  
And if the two come together, rubbing each other,  
It would be the bosom of Cheriyaichi smeared with *kumkum*. (127)

First among the insects, the bee moves, full of desire,  
Its head smeared with jasmine pollen in a golden hue:  
My heart leaps to Udayapuri, as this recalls to my mind  
Cheriyaichi, anointed with turmeric paste. (128)

Bedecked with dew drops white as pearls,  
Garbed in silken mango sprout, as darkness thickens  
The lotus buds sway in the evening breeze  
Like Cheriyaichi's bosom, as she practises dance. (129)

Into the sea of grief caused by Cheriyaichi's separation  
My mind like Sita was carried away  
By the God of Love, who, like Ravana,  
Attempts to kill me with the moon for his sword. (130)

O Cheriyaichi, dear friend, on the throne  
Of Beauty's empire the God of Love will crown you  
In a star-studded *pandal* erected in full splendour  
In the middle of the autumnal blue sky. (131)

While the sun stood with folded hands to bid farewell,  
The lotus pond, her face beautiful with the mole of a bee,  
Looked at him, but did not speak a word  
As though dismayed by the charm of Cheriyaichi. (132)

The Dusk, I am sure, eager to sing  
A hymn to the God of Love writ by me  
Took over the rhythm from the sun and the moon  
And raised the one and lowered the other, O Cheriyaichi. (133)

Lest Rohini, his new wife, should get annoyed,  
In case we saw the lustrous body of Dusk,  
The moon like a coward hid Dusk, O Cheriyaichi  
With the upper garment of moonlight. (134)

The sky is unmistakably splendid with darkness  
Soft moonlight and the purple beauty of Dusk  
Resembling the curls of Cheriyaichi adorned with  
Blue lotus, jasmine and *champak* blooms. (135)

Listening to the bee's sweet words on one side  
 The jasmine sheds tears of honey;  
 On the other it smiles with its flowers:  
 Alternating like this is my separation from Cheriyaichi. (136)

O Cheriyaichi, my jewel, the evening breeze  
 Whispered to me through the humming of bees:  
 "At Udayapuri, I removed the sandal paste from her bosom  
 And kissed her sweet face." How improper! (137)

Twilight threw up the ball of the golden moon  
 With her hands, the waves of the sea;  
 She looked like Cheriyaichi, with darkness for locks,  
 And drops of sweat in the form of stars. (138)

Some said that Cheriyaichi's face was red with anger;  
 But it was only the pink disc of the moon at twilight;  
 Some said that she was silent;  
 But honey would prostrate before her sweet words. (139)

As the female chakravaka entertained her lover  
 With lotus rings till they separated,  
 Cheriyaichi, too, had entertained me with her looks,  
 But in our separation with her mind. (140)

O lord of love, who, as a help to Cheriyaichi,  
 Vanquished the demonic army of the sun's charioteer,  
 To you the setting sun and the rising moon,  
 Are what the conch and the disc are to Vishnu. (141)

Dear friend Moon, with Cheriyaichi, as Sita  
 You burnt the hearts of youth as Hanuman burnt Lanka,  
 And dipped the tip of the tail in another ocean  
 To put out the fire of moonlight. (142)

O monarch of the Love-God's vast empire  
 Paramour of the stars on the crest of the eastern sky,  
 You are indeed a close friend to me,  
 Bringing relief with good news of Cheriyaichi. (143)

The female Chakravaka waits,  
 Hoping that the lotus bud will open at dawn,  
 Like Cheriyaichi waiting for me at the appointed time  
 Of midnight with her play-lotus in hand (144)

Seeing the lotus bud stand with joint palms  
In surrender to the moon-faced Cheriyaichi,  
The water-lily giggled at it  
With the melodious humming of the swarm of bees. (145)

Anxious to see the magnificent mansion  
Of Cheriyaichi, the foremost courtesan of Udayapuri,  
The moon ascended the sky in splendour,  
Stepping on to the tip of the eastern hill. (146)

The jasmine buds were saved from dishonour,  
As Cheriyaichi's teeth were hidden, O my friend;  
Knowing what they should know, they hid themselves  
At midnight in darkness behind a host of bees. (147)

Let the moon live a hundred years without any eclipse  
Who saved me from the pangs of separation  
By showing me Cheriyaichi's face in himself  
And her breasts in the closed lotus buds. (148)

From *Cheriyaichi*, 14th-15th century

Tr. by P. Narayana Kurup

## Ittiyaichi

ANONYMOUS

*Ittiyaichi* (Ittiyacci, 14th-15th century) is a poem of anonymous authorship. It is a ten-quatrains lyric on the charming glance of a danseuse by name Ittiyaichi.

Darling,  
Indignant with the ears that obstruct their way  
Your eyes are blood-red some might say;  
I prefer to say, my beloved Ittiyaichi, the stain owes to the blood.  
It is the blood from the hearts your glances have pierced. (107)

Darling,  
Whoever said your eyes, brighter than water-lilies,  
Are lotus blooms surrounded by the bees, your eyebrows?  
I believe, O Ittiyaichi! they are blades of Love-God's sword.  
Merciless in wounding the hearts of young people. (108)

Your eyes, they say, are liquid sapphire  
Set like a scale to measure the distance from nose to ear;  
I call them, O deer-eyed Ittiyaichi!  
Love-God's lotus ponds, where fish flash like glances. (109)



Caught in the net of ringlets  
 From the nectar-filled sea of your charms  
 A pair of fish play about, it seems,  
 In the guise of your eyes, O lotus-eyed Ittiyachi! (110)

I presume, O illustrious young lady,  
 Your eyes, those blue lilies, form a circular stage,  
 Built of sapphire by the god of love  
 With a moon-stone at centre, vibrant as a twinkling star. (111)

Enraptured was I, O Ittiyachi, when your shy face  
 Like tender foliage lowered and your faint smile  
 Like a valaka bird under a young cloud,  
 You turned on me your eyes, the source of Love-God's arrows. (112)

I feel, O Ittiyachi, my ideal damsel!  
 Your blue eyes move anxious and eager  
 Towards your earring of fresh lotus buds  
 Like a pair of bees enjoying honey from them. (113)

O Ittiyachi, crown of sweet-tongued ladies,  
 With your elephantine gait and fish-like eyes  
 Your eyes may prompt men to go in all directions  
 Enthralled to take your emerald eyes for a bed. (114)

Your graceful locks, fragrant with lotus petals,  
 Your black eyes vying with them, O Ittiyachi!  
 When those eyes stretch to your ears to see those locks  
 They get wounded; behold the blood-drop at their tips! (115)

Endeared by your beauteous bashfulness  
 Alternating with the budding of a charming smile  
 Do I see, O Ittiyachi, your eyes melt in love,  
 Swayed by the breeze and made tender by lotus arrows? (116)

From *Ittiyachi*, 14th-15th century

Tr. by P. Narayana Kurup

### Kannassa Gita

MADHAVA PANIKKAR

MADHAVA PANIKKAR (Mādhava Paṇikkar, 14th-15th century) considered to be the senior-most of the famous trio known as Niranan poets, translated *Bhagavad Gita* in 328 verses. It is an abridged translation and is regarded as one of the earliest translations of the Gita into any other language. The influence of this work in promoting the Bhakti movement has been considerable.

### Arjuna's Dilemma

The following passage, Chapter II (verses 1-8), deals with Krishna's exhortation to Arjuna to awake and arise into courageous action, shedding the soul-consuming melancholia.

All his courage melting away, tears rolling down,  
Sat Arjuna, in great melancholy.  
The kind, the flawless, the non-begotten,  
Lotus-eyed One, thus spoke:  
"This is not the way of kings,  
but of eunuchs;  
this will bring infamy and disgrace;  
this does not become you. Arise!"

"Arise!" The word ringing in his ears,  
the son of Indra responded:  
"O Krishna! how can I kill those  
whom I should worship and obey?  
More befitting will it be to go begging  
than killing the best of men, my mentors, to the last one,  
and then rule the world.

The worst it is to eat the food soaked in their blood.  
What shall I do now—fight or retreat?  
Who knows who the ultimate victor is!  
One thing I know:  
the fall of some of them will indeed be my doom too;  
the kings are all assembled here to fight to the last.

Affection for those once held high in love and esteem  
is blinding me; what is right, what is wrong—  
I am unable to assess.  
Tell me, Madhava, what is to be done  
to shake off this obsessive dilemma  
and the gripping melancholia.

Tell me how to save my conscience and my soul.  
I have no craving either for heaven or earth.  
I fall at your lotus-feet, show me the right path."  
Thus saying sat there the son of Indra, mute and weeping.

Weeping he sat, tears rolled on and on,  
soaking the chest, acting as ghee to inflame  
the unquenchable fire within.

Lord Mukunda, the dark cloud of mercy,  
 was determined to quench the fire,  
 words of wisdom to pour out in shower  
 and to give comfort and solace  
 by his bewitching lightning-smile.

Consoling he said, "See none of these will die.  
 It's idle to grieve that  
 the royal commanders will die in battle.  
 My dearest friend, your sorrow is unfounded;  
 they go to heaven, the abode of eternal happiness,  
 by the strength of their undiminished virtue.

The soul is immortal  
 whether it stays in the body or leaves it.  
 The body alone disintegrates.  
 Those who grieve know not the truth.  
 The wise know that the soul of every animate being  
 is everlasting.  
 Why worry for the great bright beings, O prince,  
 the soul is indestructible;  
 it is of different stuff."

From *Kannassa Gita*, 14th-15th century

Tr. by M. Leelavathy

## Bharatamala

SHANKARA PANIKKAR

In the art of transcreation, *Bharatamala*, the abridged translation of *Mahabharata*, is a work of wonder written by SHANKARA PANIKKAR (Sankara Panikkar, 14th-15th century), a member of the trio known as Niranam poets. There are only 1363 songs in *Bharatamala*, yet the great epic has been epitomised without losing its vitality. In literary quality it may be placed above the translation by Rama Panikkar, and is considered to be the first work in the language dealing with the complete story of *Mahabharata*. Obviously, this work was taken as a model by subsequent poets venturing on endeavours involving the story of *Mahabharata*, among whom we find the great master, Ezhuthacchan.

## Panchali's Wedding

The following passage, consisting of stanzas 35-42, describes the wedding of Panchali :

Decorations of mansions, festoons and arches on roads,  
surpassing Amaravati in grandeur; it is impossible to describe them,  
Messengers were dispatched soon;  
lords of all the eighteen countries arrived in state  
amidst deafening drum-beats  
and processions of chariots and horses.

With great aplomb and to the accompaniment of trumpets  
arrived Jarasandha and Shishupala, and then  
Shakuni, Suyodhana, his brother,  
Karna and acharyas like Bhishma.

Then arrived the Lord of all worlds

Shouri, the vanquisher of Mura,  
the Guru of the animate and the inanimate;  
his conch sounded like thunder,  
the three worlds trembled in fright.

With Krishna and Baldeva came the Yadavas, Vrshnis and Andhakas.

Krishna's searching eyes fell on all sportively;  
The son of Dharma and brothers responded;  
among the kings assembled there  
were the Pandavas disguised as Brahmins.  
The king of Panchala duly venerated the guests.

Placing the bow and arrows with reverence, he declared:  
"Among the best-mannered princes, the wedding garland will  
bedeck his neck, who, stringing the bow well,  
aims the arrow and strikes the moving *yantra* in precision.  
This is the solemn pledge." Turning to his daughter  
he said, "Wed him who does it."  
All the crowned kings stood up in response.

Jarasandha came forward, failed in the attempt;  
the virtuous Shalya also failed;  
the victorious Shishupala missed the mark here;  
even Karna could not succeed.

When all the kings proved unsuccessful  
Arjuna got up and announced:  
"Next is the turn of Brahmins, to win the girl,"  
and the kings duly withdrew.  
Apprehensive were the Brahmins, but some said,  
"Why not make a try?"

Within a winking moment, Arjuna  
went around the kings and stood before them.  
He prostrated before the bow, lifted it, wiped off the dust,  
and shot off the arrow.

He hit the aim and cut it down  
 and the girl promptly garlanded him.  
 On Arjuna the gods showered flowers.  
 "Shameful it is," thought the disheartened kings.  
 "Dishonourable for them," said the learned.  
 Kauravas fought but failed;  
 Duryodhana, Karṇa and the rest left in shameful agony;  
 Pandavas drove their chariots straight to their mother,  
 and told her

"Welcome, whatever it is", she said:  
 "The will of God it is."  
 Royal messengers arrived with formal invitations.  
 The wedding rites were performed, the sages supervising,  
 Then Pandavas went to pay their respects to their Grandfather.  
 Bhishma happily gave them half the country.  
 "You are the lords of the land, rule it well," he said.

From *Bharatamala*, 14th-15th century

Tr. by M. Leelavathy

## Kannassa Ramayanam

RAMA PANIKKAR

This extensive poetic work *Kannassa Ramayanam* (Kaṇṇaṣṣa Rāmāyaṇam, 14th-15th century) is an abridged version of Valmiki's Ramayana. The story narrated in the 24000 verses of Valmiki Ramayana is retold here in 3059 stanzas (*pattus*). The author is RAMA PANIKKAR (Rāma Paṇikkar, 14th-15th century) the most prominent of the trio known as *Niranam Kavikal* (poets of Niranam). A conspicuous common feature of their poetry is the use of a particular metre which is now known after them as *Nirana Vrttam*. The other common feature is the choice of the theme. They have adopted their themes for poetry from *itihasas* or *puranas*. Rama Panikkar has to his credit the abridged translations (rather transcreations) of Ramayana, Mahabharata and Mahabhagavata.

In several ways the Niranam poets are to be regarded as the forerunners of the literary tradition, the cultural heritage and the linguistic style found in the epoch-making works of the sage-poet Thunchathu Ezhuthacchan (Tuṇicattu Eḷuttacchan) of the 16th century. Among the works of Rama Panikkar, the most acclaimed one is Ramayana. The three poets are major contributors to the Bhakti movement of the 14th century. The innovations they brought about in the structure of the language of poetry paved the way for the evolution of a standard poetic language which got established in the works of Ezhuttacchan and is almost as intelligible to the present readers as contemporary poetic language. This innovation is the absorption of the linguistic style of Manipravala into the

poetic form of *pattu*. An amalgamation of the cultural-cum-spiritual tradition of *pattu* and the linguistic style of Manipravala was brought about. Sanskrit vocabulary began to be used freely without undergoing phonemic changes as the Sanskrit alphabet had been adopted as such. A peaceful fusion of the Dravidian and the Aryan elements in language, culture and tradition was taking place, releasing a new form of incessant energy.

## /

## Disruption of Vishwamitra's Penance

The following stanzas (217-224) from the "Balakanda" describe the endeavours of Rambha and other celestial damsels to distract Vishwamitra from his severe penance. The description of the forest in vernal splendour is extremely beautiful. Here also, the beauty of the diction, the melody of the metrical composition and the rhythmic charm together produce an enthralling aesthetic effect, which is beyond translation.

"However, O Rambha, gather up all your charms,  
be more enchanting than ever,  
get sage Vishwamitra stricken by the god of love,  
and get him out of my way."  
Hearing these words of Indra, she said,  
"My lord, I'm frightened; certain it is I'm asking for his curse."

Indra consoled her, "It's not difficult for you.  
The spirit of spring, the gentle breeze,  
the god of love and I too will assist you in making him  
lose control of his mind.  
Do it in the interests of all."  
Diffident and apprehensive,  
She entered the forest,  
already in full bloom and vernal splendour;  
the god of spring had arrived.

The woods acquired a fascinating charm;  
the divine creepers in bloom a celestial brilliance;  
honey-intoxicated bees and cuckoos  
sang in joyous self-abandonment;  
the god of love made his appearance on the scene,  
determined to subdue the sage.  
Indra assumed the form of a wondrous cuckoo  
to be near the hermit.

Like a wild tusker  
 bathed in the heavenly pool  
 and adorned with floral pollen  
 accompanied by buzzing bees,  
 drugged with the fragrance of rut  
 and shaking big trees along the way,  
 the breeze sped down around the hermitage.

Guided by destiny, the sage opened his eyes,  
 his deep meditation disturbed  
 by a soul-stirring sweet music;  
 moving along the woods before him  
 was Rambha, the celestial beauty.

Alone was she, the black-haired heavenly damsel,  
 a walking wonder; gathering flowers  
 she moved closer  
 on seeing the sage, appeared taken aback,  
 and at once bashfully withdrew behind the creepers.  
 He saw her standing there.  
 Her side-long glances charming, indeed!

Irresistible were her charms;  
 incredible was the sweetness of the cuckoo's song;  
 intoxicating was the scent of flowers;  
 enthralling was the aroma and the touch of breeze.  
 For a moment the sage lost control of himself,  
 but soon regained self-awareness,  
 repressing the passion that arose within.

Realization dawned on him that  
 this was the work of Indra and the gods.  
 Getting wild with rage  
 he flung a curse on her:  
 "A stone you will be and remain as such  
 for a hundred years."  
 Then he subdued his anger by the powers of concentration.

## 2

### The Breaking of the Bow

The following stanzas (263-275) from "Balakanda" describe picturesquely the situation of "Chapa bhanjana" (the breaking of the bow) and the highly tense

moment of the event. The poet resorts to original metaphors and concepts to enhance the dramatic effect of the situation described. The metaphor involving snakes and peacock has had its appeal to Ezhuttacchan, who did not hesitate to lift it and use it in his own work.

Then came the gods and demons and filled the upper spheres;  
the mortals assembled on the ground  
to watch the act of stringing the bow.  
"Go and look at the bow." Commanded thus  
by Sage Vishwamitra, prince Rama, son of Kausalya,  
bowed at his feet and proceeded.  
Brahmins, kings and all the rest assembled there  
saw the handsome son of Dasharatha and stood spell-bound.  
"None to beat him in loveliness", thought some;  
"So young!" some exclaimed; "How courageous!" observed some others.  
"This one is sure to do it,"  
was the comment of yet others.

"Each king has one merit or other,  
but all merits converge in this one;  
none like him in the whole world,"  
thus came the assessment from some observers.  
"Renowned Dasharatha's good fortune incarnate;"  
"All praise to sage Narayana, son of Vaibhandaka,"  
some observed.

"Just the suitable man for bow-browed Janaki,"  
observed some; "A god-send will be his success  
in stringing the bow," observed others;  
"How fortunate the rest of us, just to have seen him!"  
observed yet others.  
"Enough, enough, no more noise;  
watch the greatest wonder," shouted the rest.

Amidst the various comments and reactions,  
Rama, the lotus-eyed one, asked:  
"After lifting the bow what is expected to be done?"  
The sage looked at King Janaka  
who said, "Lift it, string it  
and break it if possible."

"If his Majesty permits so, do it without hesitation,"  
said the sage with an encouraging smile.  
Rama, the noblest of the solar dynasty, walked around the divine bow,



and paid obeisance in his mind  
to Lord Shiva, the supreme,  
invoking his blessings.

All were watching then in wonder and suspense;  
like the gods they stood unwinking,  
anxious to see what happens next.  
The prince paid homage mentally to all the mentors,  
bowed to the gods and the assembled crowd of mortals.

Lastly he bowed before the Almighty's bow,  
lifted it gracefully, bent it with one hand  
and strung it with ease.  
Wonderstruck stood some of the kings present;  
wounded pride tortured many, their rage surging;  
a hearty smile adorned the faces of the other kings  
and the seething crowd.

Wiping out the dust from the divine bow,  
vibrating the tight string and sending resonant notes,  
there stood the benign Kakutstha,  
the mighty Sree Rama, lord of all.  
Frightened were the kings, a shiver went up their spines;  
overjoyed was Janaki, the embodiment of goodness.  
The sound of thunder frightens snakes,  
but the peacocks dance and rejoice.

When the prince strung the bow with ease and grace  
with no strain of muscle,  
no sweat, not a nerve on his hand bulging.  
"Unique indeed", the people said, "never before  
have we seen such a bow-bending."

And in no time Rama bent it to the breaking point.  
It fell in pieces on the ground.  
Having accomplished the deed, graceful stood the prince  
by the side of Vishwamitra; so shocking was  
the explosive sound that all but four  
fell on the ground. Unshaken stood  
Rama, Lakshmana, Janaka and Vishwamitra.

The crowd were up on their feet soon  
to witness the gods showering flowers from heaven,  
sages and Brahmins showered their blessings,

while gods from above sounded the divine drums.  
Bowling at the feet of the great sage, Vishwamitra,  
thus spoke the saintly king, Janaka.

"Sage of sages! I seek your kind advice.  
Forthwith Sita's wedding has to take place.  
How shall we proceed?" Responded the sage:  
"Lose no time to convey the news to Dasharatha;  
befitting it will be to start the procedures after his arrival.  
Let the messengers go."

### The Pampa

The following stanzas (1-9) from *Kishkindhakanda* describe Rama's mental condition on his separation from Sita:

The lotus-eyed Rama, from Janaki separated,  
his mind stricken with the arrows of love-god,  
saw River Pampa, and said to Lakshmana:  
"Brave one, look at the woods:  
how lovely in the rich vernal splendour!

All along the banks of the Pampa, don't you see  
blooming creepers united in embrace  
with wild trees? My courage melts away seeing them.  
I feel helpless, my boy, at the touch of the breeze  
blowing from the garden;  
the blazing fires of unending separation burn in my body.

Won't beloved Janaki be also pining, love-lorn and languishing,  
if the season now be spring wherever she might be?  
See the chain of honey-filled lotuses in full bloom  
like red flames on the water,  
swans and water-fowls surrounding them.

Behold! The swans wander in joyous abandonment,  
drinking honey together with their spouses.  
The bees dance with their darlings in the woods,  
How sportive all the creatures are  
in supreme conjugal affection and joy!  
I remain the cursed one, separated from Janaki.

Janaki, dearest! you who went into the forest with m  
 the meanest of men,  
 wandering in banishment from home,  
 when shall I ever see you again?  
 Blemishless, here, is the vernal beauty;  
 burning within is my soul in the absence  
 of your moon-like face.  
 I am doomed.

The peacocks dance with their partners;  
 no cares or worries mar their joy.  
 The cuckoos sing in full-throated gusts;  
 nothing is deterring them,  
 All these cause me pain.  
 O Lakshmana! what is to be done  
 to see Sita here and now?  
 Look at the flowers of Ashoka,  
 fiery arrows of the god of love,  
 aimed at me!

Behold the dancer-wind! How sportive and artful!  
 Making the tender creeper-maids dance to his tune,  
 while bees provide a band of chorus,  
 as though playing on the lyre and singing;  
 to men in the company of full-breasted consorts,  
 this will be enchanting indeed.

Listen! The bees are singing in mad love and joy;  
 intoxicated are they drinking honey to the full.  
 The cuckoos are singing aloud, praising  
 the beautiful dance of the peacocks;  
 And look! the sprigs sway in the gentle breeze;  
 they nod in appreciation;  
 talented art-connoisseurs, they are.

Unable to see dearest Janaki,  
 the most beautiful one on the earth  
 and seeing the splendour of the lovely spring  
 my heart rent by the arrows of love-god,  
 spent am I!"  
 So saying, Rama was about to fall to the ground,  
 when Lakshmana held him up. •

4

## Meeting Sita

The following stanzas (63-76) from *Sundarakanda* describe the thoughts and sentiments of Hanuman on finding Sita under the Ashoka tree. The wonder, the exaltation, and the adoration he experienced are conveyed in their supreme intensity, quite befitting to the commitment of the Bhakti movement.

Looking for the Ashoka grove  
Hanuman then left Ravana's palace  
impatient and anxious.  
He invoked the blessings of all the gods  
and paid obeisance to Rama, the lord of the world,  
his brother the brave Lakshmana,  
and Sita, the daughter of Mother Earth.

He prayed for the favours of the gods  
to find Sita unhurt.  
Straightaway he landed in the Ashoka grove,  
even as the devotees of Rama, the divine descendant of the Sun-dynasty,  
find their easy way to heaven.

His huge physique  
he contracted into a tiny form,  
he surveyed the surroundings,  
saw the blooming plants and trees  
spreading rich aroma of flowers and honey  
and a majestic Ashoka tree near the imposing 'Chaitra' tower  
on a golden platform.

Hidden from the Rakshasa guards' eyes,  
he sat on a high branch and glanced.  
Lo! Seated on the floor a living monument of fear and melancholy  
was Sita pining for her dearest lord.  
He looked at her in amazement  
and reflected thus in wonder:

"This indeed is the long-eyed Janaki:  
I saw her once when the Rakshasa-lord  
was carrying her away.  
Now, unadorned, lean, lustreless, languishing,  
so hard to recognize.

This superbly charming lady  
thinned by the agony of separation  
and severe fasts  
is indeed Janaki, still resplendent  
like a young crescent.

A wonder it is, that Rama survives separation from her!  
Death it would be to be away from her.  
The moon may last without moonlight,  
the sun without sunlight, and fire without heat,  
but can Rama ever survive without Sita?  
It was for her sake that Rama vanquished  
Viradha and Khara who had suddenly descended upon him?  
For her sake indeed he killed the faultless Bali!  
It was to look for her that I jumped over the sea, risking dangers  
and endured all the hardships.

This incomparable holy woman,  
a feast to the eye;  
her enchanting beauty is worth the three worlds.  
Is there anything that Rama of the Sun-dynasty  
will not do for her sake?  
The Rakshasas are sure to be destroyed soon.

Yearning for a glimpse of this lotus-eyed one,  
stricken by the arrows of the god of love,  
his pride hurt by her abduction,  
Rama is deeply distressed for her,  
who has followed him to the forest without any grief.

Of the two dresses dear to her,  
one she is wearing now;  
the ornaments she dropped on the hills  
were tied up in the other.  
This one is as worn out and soiled as the other.  
The love of her lord is now her chief ornament.

I see her languishing in dim glory,  
lying on the ground, soaked in tears and dust,  
her tresses matted and unwashed,  
like the sun seen through mist,  
like a burning lamp smothered by smoke.

So this was Sita,  
the celestial luminary, the gem of a woman."  
Amidst these thoughts Hanuman, son of the wind-god,  
looked around closely and saw  
many a one-eyed Rakshasi standing guard on her,  
their looks horrifying, their weapons fierce and ready.

There he saw Sita in worn-out clothes,  
thin and emaciated,  
surrounded by demons,  
helpless in the grip of fate.  
There then reverberated a drum-beat and band-song?  
and Hanuman saw the love-stricken Ravana  
ushered into the presence of Sita.

From *Kannassa Ramayanam* 14th-15th century

Tr. by M. Leelavathy

## The Festival of the Moon

ANONYMOUS

*Chandrotsavam* (Candrōtsavam, 15th century) is an anonymous work which marks a linguistic shift in the Manipravala style with a more direct use of Sanskrit and less dependence on Tamil. The poem is centred on the life of a courtesan named Medini Chandrika and describes her divinely-inspired birth, her growth into womanhood and her conduct of a major festival to propitiate the Moon-God.

The long narrative is divided into five chapters, each consisting of more than a hundred quatrains. The following excerpt is from chapter IV (stanzas 1-19 and 75-98).

Then came autumn under a cloudless sky  
Clad in moonlight, with a lotus in hand as a gift  
To serve Medini Chandrika,  
The enchanting peacock-feather of the god of love. (1)

White clouds, scattered in the courtyard of the sky,  
Shone like moonlight, Autumn's sweet smile,  
She arrived in all splendour,  
The bride, her smile spreading rays around. (2)

O, charming lady, with eyes bewitching like wine,  
The stars shone in the cloudless sky  
At night, like pearls in the ocean,  
Drunk to its bottom by Sage Agastya. (3)

Autumn called her friend, the lotus-pond,  
 With the sounds of the water-birds;  
 And the pond responded with smile soft,  
 Raising its face, the lotus flower. (4)

A chain of bees went round the three worlds  
 With gusto and in all haste,  
 Humming charmingly to tell everyone  
 That the grand festival of the moon is on. (5)

To wipe off the remaining stain of cloud  
 The emerald-like sky  
 Took a dip in the milky ocean  
 Of moonlight at the start of night. (6)

Shining with the pollen of the seven-leafed tree,  
 The ten directions captivated every eye and heart,  
 As with medicinal herbs  
 That arouse feelings of lust. (7)

In the lotus ponds appeared bright  
 Moon-white swans singing gently,  
 As if exchanging news with zest  
 About the festival of the moon. (8)

Dear one, parrots soared high up in the sky,  
 Full of joy, in long lines  
 Broken from time to time,  
 Holding ears of corn in their beaks. (9)

Bathing in lotus ponds,  
 And coated with pollen dust,  
 The wind, like an elephant in rut,  
 Broke the hearts of forlorn lovers. (10)

Beautiful one, as the Earth was engrossed  
 In these autumnal transformations,  
 Medini Chandrika was inspired  
 To celebrate the festival of the moon. (11)

Pleasing to the mind and the eye,  
 Like a brother to the moon no longer young,  
 The lord of the land arrived  
 To protect and supervise the festival. (12)

He it was to whom the world rushed  
 When threatened by the hordes of Demon Kali,  
 And still continued to live happily:  
 The one, who was the best of men. (13)

In the land where he ruled,  
 Slinness was found only at the waist of women,  
 Crookedness only in their curls,  
 And hardness only at their breasts. (14)

He it was the handsomest and the best,  
 By looking at whom  
 Goddess Lakshmi cast off her grief  
 Caused by the glances of worthless kings. (15)

O jewel among sweet-tongued ones,  
 He was the god of love to fair maidens,  
 The god of death to enemy kings  
 And to poets the tree of wish-fulfilment. (16)

Brandishing his sword that had drunk  
 The blood of enemies like honey,  
 And leading his army, lustrous like the rising sun,  
 Came to that mansion Kantan Kotha, the king. (17)

There was confusion among the lotus-eyed maidens  
 Who rushed to the window, each eager to be the first.  
 To welcome the king with their glances,  
 Their ornaments broken in the jostling crowd. (18)

The king, having been welcomed by her  
 With sweet and delicious dishes,  
 Spoke in sweet endearing words:  
 "Let us begin the festival of the moon." (19)

\* \* \*

Sweet-tongued lady, suddenly there arose  
 Clouds of dust at the southern gate.  
 All turned in haste wondering what it was;  
 Noon at night with the glitter of gold and gem! (75)



The face of each damsel bright  
 I saw amid the cloud of dust,  
 Like a lotus blossom pale  
 In the river of the Milky way. (76)

O beautiful one, the crowd of maidens there  
 With their smiling lotus faces,  
 Apt to enchant the world with their glances,  
 Was like a growing isle of lovely women. (77)

There you see one in a golden palanquin  
 Engrossed in thoughts of amorous sport,  
 Surrounded by young maids with fans in their hands  
 And men rich enough to spite the god of wealth. (78)

Wearing anklets, bracclets, ear-rings, necklaces,  
 Gem-studded waist-chains  
 And foot-chains in lustre unmatchable,  
 She came, revealing to youths the figure of Lakshmi. (79)

Shooting myriad arrows of the love-god everywhere  
 From the iridescent corners of her eyes,  
 Smiling like the moon and the *mandara* flower;  
 She came like the ocean of milk in the sky. (80)

Followed by the poet reciting verses  
 Charming enough to move the whole world,  
 She came, making her maids enjoy the honeyed tale  
 Of Medini Chandrika, pleasing to mankind. (81)

Carrying tender sprouts of exquisite green *kumkum*  
 And beautiful gem garlands of glittering jasmine  
 And jars of Bengal's civet perfume  
 She came, followed by shouting and cheering crowds. (82)

A garland among the waves of the sea of love,  
 A gem among courtesans voluptuous,  
 She came, the acme of sensuality,  
 The moon-faced Mara Chemanti to watch the festival. (83)

Then there arose a wondrous dust-storm in the north;  
 Youngsters jostled against smart girls to reach the front; \*  
 People crowded in the streets as far as eye could see,  
 To watch the magnificent arrival of the pretty danceuse. (84)

Hear me, O vivacious lady!  
As the scent of various perfumes quite unfamiliar  
Spread in the air, O my God! I got exhausted,  
Wondering who this heavenly damsel could be. (85)

Bottles of camphor, a few hundreds in a row,  
With vials of *kumkum* by their side and spices in pots  
Along with white jars of sugar and rose water.  
Followed by silver vines: what more can I say! (86)

Sweet-tongued one, the song of these bards,  
Singing in harmony with a pleasing rhythm,  
Echoed in the air then, made more pleasing  
By the jingling bangles of the fan-bearing maids. (87)

With the bright lustre of each girl's smile  
Vast horizons turned bright,  
And the nymphs of heaven wondered for a moment,  
What could this be, like a lunar field! (88)

The lotus-faced one, with a neck like the conch,  
Holding aloft her lovely locks like a parasol,  
Proclaimed through her varied expressions  
The tricks of lust by the corners of her eyes. (89)

Rising dust she settled with rosewater sprinkle  
And cast a magical reddish hue around  
With the radiance of her coral lips  
Over the maidens who accompanied her. (90)

She recalled one by one and narrated truthfully  
Into the ear of Lakshmi-like Manavi Malika,  
The nectar-sweet story of Medini Chandrika,  
The queen of brides, leaving out nothing. (91)

O sweet-voiced one! Adored by poets  
She is the maiden whom Punam praised  
In glowing words of literary flavour,  
And then sought after by poets like Raghavan. (92)

In full splendour did she arrive, Maralekha,  
Pleasing to the eyes of Goddess Lakshmi,  
Accompanied by maids, and rousing the whole world,  
To attend the moon festival of Medini Chandrika. (93)

O lovely one with sandal-smeared bosom,  
 Instantly was the southern sky covered with dust,  
 The crowd was bewildered; the jewels of the maids glittered  
 And heavenly nymphs like Menaka fell into gloom. (94)

Like heavenly vines, showering boons, descend to earth,  
 Like waves at the full moon in the sea of love,  
 I saw lotus-eyed dames in a ring; and in the centre  
 Was the one excelling the flower-born Goddess. (95)

O high-bosomed one, with famous kings in waiting,  
 Scattering love's lotus blooms around with her lovely face,  
 With the gait of the celestial elephant in rut she came,  
 Her eyes full of joy, her face lit with an enchanting smile. (96)

She came, eulogized in faultless verse,  
 Sweet as Krishna's flute by Shankara  
 The scholar and supreme poet,  
 Who walked ahead in slow pace, infatuated. (97)

O sweet-tongued lady, thus came Manavi Menaka,  
 The dearest friend of glorious Medini Chandrika,  
 The silver dart of the god of love  
 Like Goddess Lakshmi to the festival of the moon. (98)

From *Chundrotsavam*, 15th century

Tr. by P. Narayana Kurup

## The Song of Krishna

CHERUSHSHERI

*Krishnagatha* (Kṛṣṇagāthā) by CHERUSHSHERI (Ceruśśeri, 15th century) is perhaps the best of the Malayalam works dealing with the Krishna theme in Malayalam. It generally follows the epic style, though it does not conform faithfully to any of the definitions of the epic. It is based on the tenth canto of *Bhagavata* and contains forty-seven episodes from the life of the epic hero Krishna. As in *Bhagavata*, in *Krishnagatha* too the exploits of Krishna, the divine child, till he moves over to Mathura, form the dominant theme of the first half of the work; the second half deals with the later exploits beginning with the slaying of Kamsa. Though the theme affords ample opportunities for the poet to depict the different facets of the personality of Krishna, which he utilises in full, he has broadly followed the best traditions of the Bhakti movement in Indian poetry, keeping intact the divine image of Krishna.

The author belonged to the Nambudiri community and is popularly known as Cherushsheri. His exact identity is not known; the problems relating to his name and the date of composition of the poem are not finally settled. There is a strong argument that he belonged to the Punam family and that his name was Sankara. And as far as the date of composition is concerned, the only fact widely accepted is that it belongs to the 15th century. The author himself states that he belongs to the court of King Udayavarma of Kolathunad, at whose instance he composed *Krishnagatha*. Kolathund is in North Kerala and Udayavarma ruled Kolathunad from 1446 to 1475. Hence it can be surmised that *Krishnagatha* was composed some time between 1446 and 1475. There is another work called *Bharatagatha*, attributed to Cherushsheri, which closely follows *Krishnagatha* in style and diction, but not many agree with this view.

*Krishnagatha* is composed in a highly flexible metre called *manjari*, which is remarkably musical. The popularity of the work, which is regularly recited in the rural homes of Kerala, particularly in the northern parts, during the spring season that follows the dark months of the monsoon, may be largely due to its melodious lyricism and lilting rhythms. This metre is derived from the folk songs and ballads sung by the working class.

What makes *Krishnagatha* a singular peak of achievement in the history of Malayalam is the fact that it is the first major poem that conveys the robustness of a fully-evolved Malayalam. The diction is largely free from Tamil or Sanskrit traces. During a period when Brahmin poets were engaged in writing erotic verses in highly Sanskritised Manipravala style, the author of *Krishnagatha* chose to write in chaste Malayalam which retained the flavour of folk idiom and the emotional resonance of ordinary speech.

# I

## The Rainy Season

In the midst of the narration of the exploits of Krishna, the divine child of Vrindavana, the poet makes a digression and brings in descriptions of the four seasons, *greeshma*, *pravrt*, *sarad* and *hemantha*, perhaps to fall in line with the Mahakavya style. The extract given below is the description of the rainy season:

Then came the season of rains  
as infant Krishna,  
adored by sea-born Lakshmi,  
embellished the world  
like a radiant jewel.  
The clouds shone dark-blue  
rivalling the blue-bodied god.  
Their rumblings filled the sky.

The sea was adorned with  
rain clouds, and so was the sky.

Swans fled in fear  
like the demon Kamsa in retreat;  
the rain poured non-stop;  
the land lay submerged;  
the farmers rejoiced  
welcoming the rains,  
As if to console those  
separated from their lovers.  
*kartika* flowers bloomed  
The attics, long since abandoned,  
were back in demand. The ill-clad ones,  
with no quilts, could only  
keep their inner warmth.

Strange indeed were the season's wanton  
vagaries! The sun grew dim and  
disappeared, unable to pierce  
the wall of swollen black clouds;  
like the light of wisdom  
that never penetrates the deluded mind.  
*Kadamba* trees were now in full bloom,  
black beetles made a bee-line  
for their blossoms. The ill-disposed would  
settle for only the very best!

Doors were being slammed against the rain-soaked wind.  
How can you call them chivalrous,  
those who shy away from rain!  
The dried-up rivers swelled in joy  
like the land of the cowherds  
at the coming of Krishna.  
Happy were the hornbills,  
their grief fully dissolved.  
The fragrance of the screw-pine flowers  
welcomed the passers-by.

Below the blue canopy of rain-bearing clouds  
birds like strings of flowers hovered low.  
Lamps of lightning were lit;  
trumpets of thunder sounded.  
On the earth's platter like white grains

mushrooms piled up.  
And soon peacocks, like heralds,  
began singing, full-throated,  
flaunting their music.

Those swaying to lustful tunes  
soon turned to devil-dancers as they  
were separated from the full breasts  
of their women. Ecstatic at the rain's  
splendour, sportive Krishna  
led his herd through woods,  
engrossed in playful games.  
Life-giving rains poured on, nectar-like, assuaging  
the world's fever, till at last  
exhausted, the cloud stood still.

II

The Music of Krishna's Flute

Manmatha, the god of love, comes to Vrindavan with his consort Rati, erotic passion, and companion Vasantha, the season of spring, and the whole atmosphere gets filled with the spirit of youthful enthusiasm. And then Krishna begins to play the celestial flute which transforms everything in Vrindavan, both animate and inanimate. The extract below gives a vivid picture of that transformation:

At the foot of the many-splendoured banyan tree  
Krishna played on the reed,  
keeping the rhythm and the beat.  
As each raga was rendered by the lord  
of cowherds, every being in Vrindavan  
bowed to its haunting melody.  
The butterflies thronged the face of Krishna,  
turning away from the wondrous honey of the flowers  
to savour that of his song.  
Dumb-struck cuckoos  
listened in silence  
to the melodious notes, which excelled their own  
as though they were eager  
to master those effortless tunes.  
Soon there appeared a bunch of peacocks,  
their voices exhausted with constant crowing;  
with plumes spread out in full splendour

they broke into a slow spontaneous dance.  
The most sacred of trees showered their  
honeyed flowers and stood in reverence,  
their branches stooping.  
Black stones, hard as the heart  
of Kamsa, melted like the mind of the sage Uddhava,  
Mid-way froze the fast-flowing Kalindi river, its waves  
subsiding under the waves of music. The fish  
left their abode in water, followed the trail  
of music, their glittering tails twitching in joy.  
A flock of sleepy-eyed does, gracefully  
restless, gazed at the god of cowherds  
with dreamy, half-closed eyes. They bent their  
voluptuous necks ever so gently,  
shook their ears and stood rapt in music.  
Half-eaten grass dripping from their mouths,  
they stood like painted figures, spell-bound  
by music, heedless of their young ones.  
Tears of joy flowed from their eyes,  
as they listened to the melodious flute.  
Vines like jasmine got down from the trees,  
and crept to the place from where the lord  
of milk-maids sang on. Cuckoos cooing  
in languid tones revived at the sound  
of Krishna's flute, rejoiced, and felt not more  
the pang of their mate's parting.  
The fatal blow that the savage lion was poised  
to strike at the distraught elephant  
was halted midway as the music reached him.  
Stirred by the flawless music,  
the snake yielded and let go of the rat  
it was chasing. The swan that was feeding its  
mate on lotus-stalk, stood dazed,  
struck by music, as though it had muscular tic.  
The raging tiger was quelled by music, and, melting,  
turned maternal, caressing the fawn it had pounced upon.  
For Brahma, the lotus-born,  
the notes of the flute were a vedic chant.  
For the redeemed souls  
the music spoke of eternal truths.  
The devotees found it pleasing to the mind  
like sweet divine nectar.

For the flowering trees it was a tasty delicacy.  
 For the god of love, it was a trumpet call.  
 A vehicle it was for the sense of wonder  
 and for all the worlds a source of beauty.  
 For young maidens, it was a spell of lust,  
 chanted by the god of love. No one there is  
 who can adequately praise this song;  
 even the thousand-tongued  
 serpent-god, trying to do it, will go crazy.  
 Nothing there is we can do now  
 except to long for that song.

### III

#### The Grief of the Milk-maids

Krishna played with the milk-maids in gay abandon and that made them proud, and their ego swelled to great heights. He then wanted to teach them a lesson and just vanished from their sight. The forlorn milk-maids, caught in the pangs of separation, went about in search of their lord. The extract below depicts their sorrowful plight:

Tell us, O mango tree!  
 have you seen the lord of Lakshmi pass this way?  
 Where has he fled,  
 consigning us to the flames of passion?  
 Shedding drops of honey, your head tossing  
 in the wind, are you telling us:  
 "I have not seen the lord anywhere!"

O nightingale! did you see  
 the lord of cowherds go by this route?  
 You seem to have learnt from his majestic flute.

Tell us, O *champak*! did you see  
 the lotus-eyed one walk by with elegance?  
 We are crazy for him but he has walked away,  
 hurling us into the forest.

Tell us, O Jasmine! did Krishna caress you,  
 as you have desired?  
 Your rapturous thrill at his touch  
 may be seen in these buds.  
 O Mallika! didn't you see the handsome one



walk by gracefully?  
It seems he has smiled at your flowers today.

Listen to my grief, Jessamine,  
and put an end to it with your gentle words.  
We are not embittered that our lord  
has reduced us to grief and, by making himself scarce,  
consigned us to death-in-life.  
He came near you, didn't he?  
How else could your flowers gain the fragrance  
and sweetness of his words?  
Are you silent because you have not seen him?  
It fills us with sorrow.

Black beetles! have you seen the noble lord  
with whom we sport in amour?  
Did he pass this way with his majestic gait,  
playing on his flute?

Tell us, O Mandara!  
did you see the lotus-eyed one stride by  
in all his grace?  
It is many hours since he vanished,  
deceiving us.

O kayav! did you see our lord?  
Confide in us honestly; he is enamoured of you;  
Your flowers and his body glow with the same colour.  
The music of his flute has enchanted us.  
He has led us into these revelries  
Only to desert us in the middle.

O bakul! adorned with splendid flowers,  
tell us, as fast as you can,  
where the lotus-eyed one has gone.

O pipal! you have always been loyal to Krishna.  
Tell him to spare us the agony.  
We have been asking every tree  
about Krishna, the beloved of our hearts,  
but, banyan tree, you tell us  
just where he is.

O fig tree! he who has ensnared our minds  
has forsaken us. Our bodies are ablaze;  
we are ourselves the fire of passion.  
Holy fig tree! tell us  
if you have seen Narayana.  
Do not shy away from speaking to us,  
because we are women in distress.  
We have sought him all over the woods  
but nowhere could we spot him.

O jasmine! why do you bow your head down?  
Has the son of Nanda censured you?  
You have no grudge against him,  
Except that his smile has put your flowers in the shade.

O pandanus! have you seen  
the majestic figure of the lord of cowherds?  
He stole away when we were all in the woods.  
Little did we know he would one day  
let us down like this.

Antelopes! why do you flee from us?  
As you can see we are no arrows.  
We are eagerly looking for someone  
who would listen to our sorrows.  
Forsaken by Krishna, the soul of our being,  
we have no man to protect us.  
Like those dispossessed of their assets,  
we run helter-skelter, wailing without shame.  
We are about to perish!  
If you are rushing to listen to his flute,  
tell him we are languishing for his presence.

Peacocks! did you happen to see Keshava,  
the one we are looking for?  
Didn't he come to you with his playmates  
to secure the gift of your feathers?  
If you meet him, kindly tell us;  
you see we have been roaming all over the place,  
grieving, looking for him.

Cuckoos! did you see the lord of cowherds  
pass this way?  
Grief-stricken, we wail and wander,

but he is nowhere to be seen.  
Why do we wail like this?  
It is just that we could not see him.

Swans, why do you weep all the time?  
Because you cannot see Nanda's son?  
Not knowing what he might be doing,  
we too are overcome with grief.

Chrysanthemums! you are now the crowning glory  
of flower plants.  
We stand beside you like the drooping lotus of winter.  
He comes to us when we are love-sick,  
works us to the pinnacle of passion,  
he comes stealthily and conquers with a smile,  
Then, consigning us to misery, he vanishes  
into the woods.  
Scalded by the flames of passion,  
we are adrift,  
not knowing what is good for us.  
He is known by the name of Krishna;  
and has with him a maid  
who would never part with him.  
Tell us where he can be found,  
as we are setting out to find him.

O njazhal, have you seen the one who glows  
with undimmed brightness?  
we wail in grief, roaming all over.  
He has put us to this plight.

O screwpine! please answer me straight,  
when I address this question gently to you;  
did you, by any chance, see our dear one  
come this way?  
He is of the colour of black clouds  
he has black hair pleated neatly  
he has a flute in his hand  
and trinkets with tingling bells on his feet,  
bright ornaments on his body.  
He is clad in yellow  
and his speech is endearingly sweet.  
Luscious curls fringe his brows,

which radiate heavenly light.  
 He has a saffron mark on his forehead,  
 and bracelets on his wrists.  
 He puts on a smile  
 that can pierce the hearts of women.  
 Through his frequent sly looks  
 he flashes messages of love.  
 Even if you have not seen him,  
 do not break the bad news to us  
 with your blunt words.  
 Would you not be moved by the wretchedness  
 of our grief-stricken plight?

Thus in sorrow they enquired of every tree,  
 writhing in the pangs of passion.

#### IV

#### Subhadra and the Ascetic

Arjuna, in the guise of a *sanyasin*, comes to Dwarka to meet his sweetheart, Subhadra, with the connivance of her brother, Lord Krishna, and there ensues a series of funny episodes which Cherushsheri narrates in the following lines.

As the blessed young maiden  
 saw the ascetic come near,  
 she got up at once very much delighted,  
 as if she saw her own beloved.  
 Driven by desire, she said to herself:  
 "This is no ascetic; this must be the god of love  
 come disguised to afflict my mind.  
 At his very sight my body aches with joy,  
 and I feel tongue-tied.  
 How shall I offer ceremonial worship to him,  
 when I cannot even stand composed before him?"

Thinking thus she bowed before his feet.  
 To the virgin bowing before him  
 he spoke slowly in a tone of blessing:  
 "In your noble appearance  
 you seem to me the very abode of the god of love.  
 May you live happily for ever  
 with the man of your choice!"

As she listened to him,  
 struck by gloom she thought to herself:  
 "Alas! the man of my choice is none other than  
 this man whose words will never  
 come true in my life. How sad is it  
 that an ascetic's words should thus be  
 proven false! My mind has long been lost  
 to Partha who excels the lord of love in beauty,  
 But now this ascetic pulls it towards himself."

Thus did the blessed one feel  
 afflicted by pangs of passion.  
 In distress she spoke to Partha residing in her own mind:  
 "The mind which once flowered in your love  
 has got tuned to an ascetic who excels you.  
 Should you fail to help me,  
 this may soon turn scandalous."

When the charming virgin thus felt helpless,  
 her maids, among themselves, whispered;  
 "He does not seem to glance at this virgin  
 with an ascetic's eye.  
 Did you notice how he spoke to her in sadness  
 with his sidelong glances:  
 'Supreme among the belles of this world,  
 my life is in your hands.  
 O lotus-eyed! abandon me not  
 so mercilessly to the god of love  
 The sight of your crimson lips beside me  
 fills me with yearning.  
 I am going to embrace you this very moment,  
 even if these people look on'.  
 Will an ascetic ever speak this way  
 through his tell-tale eyes?  
 Believe me, this is no ascetic;  
 he has come to deceive us."

As those clever maids talked about him,  
 the virgin left at once to pursue the task  
 of preparing his food. When she was no more before him,  
 the ascetic became deeply depressed.  
 He lost himself in thoughts about her,  
 so deeply that those who came to worship him  
 talked among themselves in these words:  
 "Never have we seen a sage of this kind before.  
 Since his mind has merged with the infinite.

its ecstasy has rendered his senses passive,  
engrossed in deep meditation,  
he hardly sees us standing in front.  
This is the way of the blessed ones  
who are awake within."

As they spoke thus in amazement and left,  
with faith in him,  
the clever virgin was soon back  
with offerings of food.  
His presence filled her with passion;  
she was all aflame within.  
She cleaned his feet caressingly  
with devotion, and placed a leaf before him  
on a pedestal. Pierced by the arrows  
of passion and swollen with its pangs,  
she kept on serving him food,  
with a mind filled with pain.  
Since his eyes were fixed on her,  
he did not stop her, and soon all the rice  
from the vessel got piled up on the leaf.  
Her eyes riveted on him, she went on pouring  
ghee on to the leaf.  
Her mind dazed,  
she threw away the peeled bananas,  
and, in their stead, offered him their rinds,  
as she was under his spell.  
And he ate the rind with great relish  
his mind equally dazed.  
Perplexed and panicky, she served first  
what was to be given last,  
and the last dish was served first.  
The one who sat in front of her hardly noticed  
what was being served to him.

The meal served, the illustrious one  
retired for rest as the night descended.  
Burning in the heat of passion,  
he could not bear to part from her.  
He would put out the light  
and call out to her for a lamp.  
When she appeared with the lamp,

he would assume a grave posture,  
 though wavering within.  
 Once she went back, he would writhe  
 in the agony of love.  
 Throwing away all water  
 he would call out for water;  
 then she would come with water.  
 But, once she left, he would again be  
 grief-stricken. The scorching heat  
 of love would make him call out again  
 for something else.  
 Thus did he spend night after night  
 plagued as he was by the pangs of love.

From *Krishnagatha*, 15th century

Tr. by E. V. Ramakrishnan

## Ramayana Champu

PUNAM NAMBUDIRI

*Champu* (Campu) literature in Sanskrit has its exponents and imitators in Kerala from early times. Melputtur Narayana Bhattathiri, the renowned devotional poet of Kerala, had composed Sanskrit *champus* based on the stories of Ramayana, Mahabharata and Bhagavata, and these were widely used by Chakiars in their Koothu performance, which was one among the popular temple art forms of Kerala, concerned with the narrative exposition of the Epics and the Puranas. Champu in Malayalam came to be written simultaneously, dealing with almost the same themes and utilised by the Chakiars for the same purpose. Ramayana Champu, Bharata Champu and Naishadha Champu are considered to be the best among the lot, which includes several works of lesser literary merit.

PUNAM NAMBUDIRI (Punam Nampūtiri) is supposed to be the author of *Ramayana Champu* (Rāmāyana Campu). He probably belonged to the 16th century and was a native of Koothuparambu in northern Kerala. He adorned the court of Manavikrama, the Zamorin of Kozhikode, who was a great patron of art and poetry. It is said that Manavikrama's court consisted of eighteen and a half poets, eighteen full poets who wrote in Sanskrit, and Punam, the half-poet, who was given that status because he wrote only Malayalam poetry. *Ramayana Champu* is his magnum opus, a massive work, consisting of 20 parts dealing in full with the epic story of Rama. Among the several other *champu* works attributed to him are *Bharatam*, *Kotiyaviraham*, *Parijataharanam*, *Chellurnathodhayam*, etc. *Ramayana Champu* is noted for its felicity of expression, profuse imagery and subtle humour.

1

Tataka

As directed by Vishwamitra, Rama along with Lakshmana, was proceeding to the forests to provide protection to the sages doing penance there. On the way they encountered Tataka, the demoness, whose graphic description by Vishwamitra is given below:

Behold her copper-coloured locks of hair,  
 decked with skull and bowels and bones,  
 vying with the wild graveyard jungle,  
 with stones and thorns rattling in the wind.  
 Like a bamboo cluster, it touches the ends of the sky.  
 Behold her awe-inspiring forehead where  
 on the tip of the eyebrows the merciless lord of injustice  
 has set up his flag-staff.  
 Behold her huge serpentine eyebrow,  
 whose sight forces the fierce mace-like hand  
 of the god of death to flee and hide itself:  
 it can verily swallow the three worlds.  
 And the pair of eyes that outwit a large dry well,  
 two balls rolling in the centre of its red interior;  
 their fierce look is terrible indeed.  
 Behold her, advancing forth,  
 like the live cinders of the ferocious fire of Death,  
 like the very quintessence of black venom,  
 like a solid rock flung by the soldier of Death  
 like the rising sun of universal destruction!  
 No one can bear this sight:  
 her nose, putting into the shade a mountain cave,  
 while she breathes in and breathes out,  
 does and stags get entangled and bleat.  
 Behold her earrings made of the heads  
 of wild elephants in rut crushed by the blow of her hand!  
 Behold her gaping mouth made fierce by  
 her fangs drenched in blood spilt while drinking.  
 Behold her teeth, surpassing huge axes  
 and her nose, resembling a vulture.  
 Behold her arms, sturdier than black palmyra,  
 one of them raised, and her two breasts  
 without a rival is there a hill taller than the golden hill?),  
 painted with the saffron juice oozing from bodies devoured.  
 Behold her waistband made of bowels.



Oh, the best in the Raghu dynasty,  
 note that she has no fatigue  
 even when a thousand youthful elephants  
 gather together and try to crush her.  
 Her heart filled with excessive arrogance,  
 she roars aloud once, then swings and sways  
 and takes a leap, lo, the earth is tilted to one side!  
 even as my mind is atremble now.  
 Because she belongs to the fair sex,  
 are you reluctant to aim the arrow at her?  
 When you hunt tigers, Oh king!  
 do you distinguish between male and female?  
 It is flesh that she eats, it is hermits that she kills,  
 it is lance that speaks for her,  
 her body is twin-born with the western Ghats;  
 all this considered, other than manliness  
 where is femininity in her? Enough of talking;  
 she is fast approaching.  
 The terrible sound of her wrath  
 echoes from the caverns of the great mountain.  
 See, some hermits all over, run and hide,  
 greatly upset by the arrival of Suketu's daughter.  
 See, some of them fall down and sob  
 See, those who cannot run raise their hands and curse.  
 See, the young and the old and the women-folk cry.  
 See, she comes along, speaking as follows:  
 "It is night-fall, and I am getting hungry,  
 Alas! this thirst is difficult to bear,  
 yesterday for dinner I ate ten elephants  
 and I had plenty of wild buffaloes.  
 But that is not enough. Wild buffaloes are no good,  
 I have had enough of lions for food:  
 The eight-foot deer and boar will do for a rich meal,  
 But no other meat can equal the excellence of human flesh.  
 Brahmin boys with the loin-cloth and rod  
 have not been seen around."  
 See her coming along shouting such words.

## 2

### The Moon-Rise

Sita was kept a captive under guard at the Ashoka garden in Lanka, the abode  
 of Ravana. Ravana decided to meet her at the midnight hour. He wanted all his

pomp and splendour exhibited before her so that she would come round fully satisfied and impressed by his prowess. As part of this arrangement, he directs the moon to shine at the appointed time, and the moon obeys.

Given below is a description of the moon-rise:

Like the face of Lady East,  
like the mirror of Lady Night,  
like the golden earring of Lady East,  
like the wedding locket of the goddess of love,  
like the ceremonial seat of the god of love,  
like the white parasol held up  
to welcome the advent of the god of love,  
rose the moon in slow motion.

Like powdered camphor sprinkled on nectar  
like the benign smile of the universe,  
like the sea of milk that spreads far and wide,  
like white ashes scattered around,  
like lustrous white paint sprayed everywhere,  
like pearls strewn all over  
sweet moonlight swelled in the cool expanse,  
seeing its radiance the entire brood of demons  
played the game of love, each with his beloved,  
revelled themselves in drinking fresh wine,  
engaged in the mock fight of lovers,  
made loud shrieks of ecstatic delight,  
and tried out new techniques of entertainment,  
plunging themselves headlong into an ocean of bliss.

3

### The Burning of Lanka

Hanuman came to Lanka as an emissary of Rama and met Sita. She was consoled and was assured that she would be free before long. Hanuman then went to the court of Ravana and taunted him, which provoked Ravana. Ravana ordered his men set fire to the tail of Hanuman, who in turn set fire the city of Lanka. The burning of Lanka is described in the passage given below:

When they heard Ravana,  
the fiercest demon in the whole world,  
speak thus, the wicked demons,  
with great arrogance, approached Hanuman,

and started winding clothes around his tail  
that kept on lengthening.

When all the clothes in their houses were used up,  
and the tail could not be fully covered,  
their zest waned and they felt weary,  
and their hopes were shattered.

As they soaked it timidly  
till all the stored-up jars of oil  
and pots of melted butter were used up,  
they saw the flames of fire  
like the girdle of Time, the Serpent,  
with its hood raised.

With the tip of his tail  
entwined with trailing creepers of resplendent flames,  
the great-souled monkey  
offered to Lakshmi the homage of fire.  
By god, no one can describe the distress  
that descended on the city of Lanka  
like the Triple-city destroyed by the spark  
that shot from Shiva's third eye.

The great demon had set out once  
and overcome the gods in heaven  
and pulled out selected plants from the Nandana garden,  
and planted them in his courtyard park  
watered and nurtured and reared them up.  
Their branches grew thick and rose high,  
as if rushing towards heaven once again.  
These gardens of heavenly trees  
where blossomed the divine riches  
like silk and gold and gems and robes  
arising from their over-increasing glory  
all became burnt and roasted.  
The flames arose and in every direction  
sparked off live cinders in quick succession—  
some flocks of birds were scorched, some baked:  
this was the commotion in one place.

In some places they played chess,  
gambled and juggled with balls;  
lost in their merriment they knew not  
when their mothers died;

watching with unwinking eyes,  
 for check by elephant or by chariot,  
 boasting, losing the game,  
 and starting again, betting and shouting.  
 As they pursued their entertainments  
 in groups and in secrecy,  
 rows of lovely mansions got burned  
 and the red-hot cinders sparked off ceaselessly  
 and broken limbs like eyes and ears fell around.  
 Demon couples wondered  
 what it was and walked a few steps  
 through the flames and fell over and cried aloud:  
 that was the commotion in another place.

To put out the approaching fire,  
 a crowd of demons ran about in their mansions  
 or scurried along on the parapets,  
 turning over what had burned down,  
 carrying pots of water,  
 stealing things from crowded groups,  
 shouting, "O, sinners, the fire has fallen on us:  
 children, keep away. Take to the main road.  
 Take the ornament box later;  
 take the document chest first."  
 The demons ran around in fear  
 getting blows on both the cheeks  
 from the raised tip of the arrogant monkey's tail.  
 Their hue and cry caused the commotion  
 in yet another place.

Alas! old men and women and children  
 ran into caves and hid themselves for fear.  
 What a pity! ceaselessly they cried,  
 all of them together wailed aloud.  
 Oh! has the fire reached the inner chambers  
 where the leader of the demons lived?  
 Never before has such a mishap  
 befallen in the city of the demons.  
 It must be one of the heroic gods  
 that has turned into this monkey, no doubt.  
 Because Sita has been brought over here,  
 certain it is that ruin will descend on this clan.  
 Speak low: if Ravana comes to know this,  
 he will have no hesitation or discrimination.

Alas! see on the right side,  
 a huge column of smoke, almost black,  
 moves up into the sky.  
 A disgusting smell too rises  
 Has the hair caught fire?  
 Ravana's younger brother's mansion is on fire,.  
 What a pity, O God!  
 If the burning building falls on his body  
 the demon chief may perhaps wake up.  
 The country is ruined.  
 The young prince is there:  
 the fire has entered his nostrils:  
 Kumbha and Nikumbha and a host of demons  
 have set out looking for the sea  
 to drench Ravana's brother.  
 Such cries and lamentations  
 caused the commotion in another place,

In one place the wild cries of herds  
 of elephants caught in the fire,  
 and running about, shaking up the earth,  
 in another place the braying of horses in distress;  
 in yet another place the wailing of frightened children;  
 in another place the cries of animals brought for sports.  
 Some people fell into the fire;  
 some rushed and leaped into rivers;  
 some ran in all the ten directions;  
 some broke open the granaries;  
 some carried away vessels;  
 some concealed gold and money;  
 some caused shudder through their wild cries.  
 some quaked listening to the cries.  
 some beat up one another and grew furious.  
 The marble mansion was turned into ashes.  
 The wooden planks were burned one by one.  
 The chests were all consumed by fire.  
 The camphor altar was in flames.  
 The royal white umbrella began to burn.  
 The musk pond got hot and boiled over.  
 the pool of sandal paste dried up.  
 The *kumkum* garland got entangled with garments;  
 The love-game centres went up in flames.

the emerald platform turned into hot cinders.  
 Hidden by smoke the stables of horses  
 got burned and collapsed on their own.  
 Fire entered the elephant stables.  
 Perfume-stones came in between.  
 All things of silver melted and fell.  
 on the back of old people.  
 Children were caught by fire,  
 and in their agony they fell on their faces.  
 Frankly the crowds of demons  
 got depressed and wailed.  
 Running around they howled helplessly.  
 All the twenty eyes of Ravana,  
 the king of demons, looked sad,  
 he came down from his mansion.  
 Even the divine serpent  
 will find it difficult  
 to describe the plight  
 of those who ran helter-skelter,  
 worried about their impending death.

4

### The Desertion of Sita

When once Sita was rescued from Lanka and brought to Ayodhya by Rama, public opinion turned against him. Her chastity was again questioned by the people and Rama ultimately decided to forsake her to prove his royal integrity. This unpleasant task of leaving her in the forest was entrusted by him to his brother Lakshmana, who carried out the order with a heavy heart. He left her by the river Ganga. The following passage narrates the sorry plight of Sita:

Then did Lakshmana,  
 his eyes drenched in tears  
 tired and weary,  
 walk around the chastest of women  
 and bow low before her  
 and get into a boat and leave her in slow motion.  
 Like a young doe  
 caught in the wild fire burning in high flames  
 all around in limitless forest,  
 Sita, bereft of courage, and sad,

her moist eyes staring,  
fainted at once unexpectedly.  
Fainting from fatigue helps those  
who have no refuge.  
Walking up in a little while  
she came to realize  
that her spouse had deserted her.  
She went on weeping  
and looked incessantly towards the northern bank,  
even as Lakshmana vanished from her view;  
seeing the intense darkness growing thick  
and hearing the sound of fierce beasts of prey,  
terrified and trembling she cried:  
"Alas, never did I imagine  
such a plight would come to me!  
What shall I do now?  
Who is there now to give me shelter?  
What sin did I commit in the past  
that I should be eaten up by wild beasts?  
Who on earth will be as merciless as Lakshmana?  
Why should one speak about it at all?  
This is the result of what I have done in the past.  
The sinner that I am, what for is this pregnancy  
and this life of mine?  
God, may such grief never befall  
even one's foes!  
When I think of the splendour, ever on the increase,  
of my days in Ayodhya beside that jewel of a king,  
how can I help feeling pangs of agony?  
This is my appointed destiny:  
Who can ever escape it?  
What wrong have I done, O king!  
that I should be forsaken in the woods  
so soon and bereft of love?  
How could you forget the words,  
you spoke to me day and night, my lord,  
that you could not live without me even for half a moment?  
It is never too good for anyone  
to lie even to the lowly.  
My noble lord, have you forgotten  
the hymn we chanted at the time of wedding?  
Have you forgotten how pleasures we enjoyed  
without interruption since childhood?

Have you forgotten how I went with you  
 into the forest renouncing everything for love?  
 Have you forgotten how we walked together  
 treading on every stone and thorn in the woods?  
 Have you forgotten, my lord,  
 how sleep failed us through sheer fatigue?  
 Have you forgotten how I jumped into the fire  
 when you ordered me to do so?  
 Have you forgotten how the god of fire  
 handed me over to you in all humility?  
 Have you forgotten how in the presence of all  
 you took me back free from stain?  
 Have you forgotten how the entire people  
 welcomed the coronation with joy?  
 In no way have I gone against God:  
 the grief of separation I can endure,  
 but why did you add the word of blame?  
 Why should I not kill myself?  
 It may be all right to end my life in the Ganga.  
 Why doesn't Death arrive?  
 Will a dog touch one deserted by her lord?"  
 As Janaki lamented like this,  
 the earth quaked, people were startled,  
 the glory of the woods dimmed,  
 the water in the rivers became turbid all of a sudden,  
 the sun plunged into the ocean then,  
 the wind slowed down at once,  
 the trees dropped the flowers and drooped,  
 the does suddenly wailed aloud,  
 pathetic rose the sound of birds.  
 Impossible it is to describe the grief  
 that descended on the whole world at that time.

From *Ramayana Champu*, 16th century      Tr. by V. R. Prabodhachandran Nayar

## Selections

### EZHUTHACCHAN

THUNCHIATHU RAMANUJAN EZHUTHACCHAN (Tuñcattu Rāmānujan Eḷuttacchan, c.16th century) popularly known as Ezhūthacchan, is endowed with all the attributes of a father-figure in modern Malayalam. It was he who standardised the



Malayalam language, which, upto his time, was highly Sanskritised on the one hand, or subjected to the influence of Tamil on the other. Ezhuthacchan adopted from both whatever was adaptable to the native genius and native idiom, and thus modelled a new language structure that had stood the test of time. He evolved a poetic diction which was basically a synthesis of the prevailing Pattu (Tamil-oriented) and Manipravala (Sanskrit-oriented) schools in Malayalam poetry, but which was distinctly different from both. He was a visionary, a philosopher, and a spiritual leader who gave a new impetus to the Bhakti movement in Malayalam literature. No wonder, therefore, that he is considered the harbinger of the renaissance in Malayalam poetry and Kerala culture.

But very little is known about his life and career. It is generally believed that he belonged to the 16th century, though the exact dates of his birth and death are not available. He was born at Trikkandiysur in Tirur in Malappuram District. Being born into a Sudra (Nair) family, he had his own share of problems with regard to education, so common in a caste-ridden society but he managed to acquire sound knowledge not only in literature but in Vedanta and other systems of philosophy. He was also conversant with, apart from Sanskrit, other Dravidian languages such as Tamil and Telugu. The major part of his life he spent as a village school master at Tirur. Towards the later stages he retired to the village Chittoor where he built a gurukula and spent his last days peacefully, imparting spiritual knowledge to a few disciples and writing poetry. His *samadhi* at Chittoor, by the side of the river Sokanasini, is a hallowed place where his wooden sandals and yogic staff are kept and worshipped as relics of a noble and divine life.

Ezhuthacchan's fame as a poet depends, to a great extent, on two of his works, *Adhyatma Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. *Adhyatma Ramayana* is a translation of the Sanskrit work by the same name. *Mahabharata* is a condensation of *Vyasa Bharata*, reduced to a tenth of its original length and can well be considered an independent work. Both these works have won wide popular acclaim and are regularly recited even today with piety and devotion in Hindu households in Kerala. Among the other major works attributed to him are *Mahabhagavata*, *Harinamakirtana*, *Irupattinaluvrttam* and *Chintaratna*.

# 1

## Adhyatma Ramayana

*Adhyatma Ramayana* (Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa) and *Valmiki Ramayana* deal with the same story of Rama, but with one essential difference. The former concerns itself solely with the divine aspect of Rama as an incarnation of Vishnu whereas in the latter that aspect is one among the several, such as those of the son, the king, the warrior, and the custodian of dharma. The spiritual identity of Rama established in *Adhyatma Ramayana* had a great fascination for Ezhuthacchan, who therefore took up the task of translation of that work in preference to *Valmiki Ramayana* and thus contributed his share to the Bhakti movement,

gaining momentum in several parts of India. The composition is in the poetic genre, Kilippattu (Song of the Bird), a peculiar form which was made popular by Ezhuthacchan. Though a translation, *Adhyatma Ramayana* exhibits all the attributes of an independent work and carries the stamp of originality. Devotion and spirituality merge with imagination and poetic finesse to create a work of enduring greatness and thus Ezhuthacchan's *Adhyatma Ramayana* stands out as the most remarkable contribution to medieval Malayalam poetry.

*i*

Invocation

Each canto of Ramayana begins with an invocation to the gods, particularly to Rama, whom the poet adores with all his soul. There is an effusion of great devotional fervour and one epithet after another comes in quick succession, creating a verbal image of the deity in all His divine splendour. The following excerpt from the first canto, Balakanda, is an instance in point. It is followed by an account of the greatness of Ramayana.

*[Hari: Sree Ganapataye Nama: Avighnamastu]*

Victory to you, O Sreerama, Rama, Rama, Sreeramachandra!  
 Victory to you, O Sreerama, Rama, Rama, Sreeramachandra!  
 Victory to you, O Sreerama, Rama, Rama, O, Sita's beloved!  
 Victory to you, O Sreerama, Rama, Rama, O, the world's beloved!  
 Sreerama! Rama, Rama, who slays Ravana, O, Rama!  
 Sreerama! Rama, Rama, who plays in my heart, O Rama!  
 Rama, the soul of Raghu's clan! Sreerama, O Rama's dear Lord!  
 Sreerama, the fair-bodied, I worship you and only you!  
 Narayana, I bow to you; I bow to you, Narayana!  
 Narayana, I bow to you; to you I bow, Narayana!  
 Here, darling bird that came chanting Rama's name!  
 Tell me the tale of Rama, hesitate not!

The little parrot worshipped the worthy

And with Rama in her mind began to speak:

O, you who lead the clan, the primal cause, the divine-souled source  
 Embodied compassion, god born to Shiva and Shakti,  
 Elephant-faced, let no worldly obstacles  
 Impede my divine mission, so I pray to you.

Dwell forever, O, Mother Word, on my tongue,  
 Imaged in letters, the incarnate soul of the Vedas!  
 Dance, dance on my tongue, O deer-eyed maid!

Dance, shameless like the naked Shiva in the woods,  
 O, maid that dwells on the lily-face of the lotus-born Brahma  
 O, benevolent Bharati! let words surge up in me forever and forever.  
 Words, fair, well-featured, reel and roll and well up in me.  
 Ceaseless, continuous like the billowing waves of the mighty sea!

You, Vishnu, the cosmic soul as Krishna born  
 In the Vrishni clan, bestow on me your special blessings!  
 To Vyasa I bow, the offspring born to the great grandson  
 Of Vishnu, the wisest of sages, Vishnu himself incarnate!  
 To you I bow, O, Krishna *dwaipayana*<sup>1</sup>, the author of the Puranic lore,  
 Witness to Vishnu's heroic worldly life.

And forever in supplication to Valmiki I bow,  
 To that great sage and the greatest test of poets,  
 Revered even by the four-faced Brahma for his creation  
 Of Ramayana that equals the Vedas, all the four.  
 Let Parameshwara, the almighty god of gods,  
 The destroyer of the love-god, the greatest and the most divine,  
 Dwell forever in my mind, so I pray  
 Lend me your support, O Brahma and your divine tribe,  
 The sacred sages of Narada's order,  
 And Parvati, the consort of Shiva,  
 Foe to the god of love, with his arrows of flowers.  
 Give me succour, O Lakshmi, daughter of the lotus!  
 Let my mind's mirror be polished and cleansed  
 By the pollen of the Brahmins' red lotus-feet,  
 I pray to them, the source of this world.

The god of all the worlds too has sprung  
 From the Vedic lore, my teachers have said,  
 And the Vedas have sprung in turn from the Brahmins  
 Whose blessings and curse have the sanction of the gods.  
 Who can sing the praise of those  
 Noble ones, well-versed in the Vedas?  
 I, foremost among the ignorant, born of Brahma's feet,  
 This pious slave, fit only to wash their feet,  
 Here dares retell Ramayana, celebrated by the Vedas  
 As best as the unwise ever can do.

Let all learning of Vedas, their branches and of Vedanta  
 Be awake and clear in my mind, and help me in my mission.

<sup>1</sup> Another name for Vyasa.

Let the ever-moving god of air, the kind god of wealth,  
 The god of the beasts, that spring of mercy, the god of the stars,  
 The god of the clan, the son of the heavenly Ganga's lord,  
 The god that commands the armies of heaven,  
 The god of the sprites, the lieutenant of Shiva,  
 The god of the day, the soul of the world, of the Shruti,  
 The god of planets and of all things, moving and unmoving,  
 I worship you through day, through night,  
 An orphan seeking your blessings kind;  
 I worship you, with joy in my mind.

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Sreeramayana that runs into a hundred crores  
 Of books, the one Brahma composed, is not here on earth.  
 The savage chanting Rama's name turned into a sage,  
 And Brahma observing this commanded him to write  
 Ramayana for the deliverance of all beings on earth.  
 Narada's counsel Valmiki had and the goddess  
 Of the word dwelt forever on his tongue.  
 Dwell so on my tongue too: this I long to say  
 But am too shy so to pray.  
 What of that? This excuse I surely have  
 That no authority I am of the Vedas and the sciences of the spirit.  
 Pardon me so! This Adhyatmaramayana too shall  
 The soul enlighten, told by Shiva as it is  
 And full of the profound secrets of the spirit.  
 All the mortals who read this book will  
 Doubtless attain salvation in this one life itself.  
 Listen to me with devotion full in your heart,  
 As I recount in brief the glorious tales of Rama.  
 The wise who choose to hear them, slaves to the senses though,  
 Their worldly bondage will break, and deliverance attain,  
 I bow to the divine feet of Sita's lord, one learned in the Vedas,  
 The incarnation of Narayana, who in yogic posture sleeps  
 On the serpent-bed in the middle of the milky sea,  
 Who condescended to be born on earth as Dasaratha's son  
 In the solar dynasty as Brahma and the gods so piously had  
 Appealed to his mercy to lighten the earth's terrible load,  
 And, sending Ravana, the nocturnal being and his ilk,  
 To the world of death, attained the state of Brahma.

*ii*

## Ahalya Praises Rama

This extract from Balakanda is a hymn sung by Ahalya in praise of Rama after she was resurrected by him from the curse which had turned her into a stone.

"Content I am, O Lord of the Universe!  
 Not only because I could see you; let me say,  
 Because of your greatest blessing, I received  
 Some dust from your lotus-feet  
 Worshipped by gods like Brahma and Rudra.  
 Can anyone, even if he worships you for aeons,  
 Ever attain this?  
 O Master of the world! Mysterious are your acts,  
 You act like a man and tempt us into delusions  
 You brim with joy, you the supreme deliverer, you are perfect  
 And you are empty too, less than zero, empty, and still.  
 River Ganga, chastened by the dust of your lotus-feet  
 Purify Shiva, the wearer of the serpents, and Brahma and others  
 By your sweet influence.  
 And now I too have been touched by your feet!  
 What virtuous deeds have I done before, O Vishnu!  
 Why explain them to you, O, disinterested, rare, rare Vishnu!  
 You god incarnate as man,  
 You, fair of mind, bright of body, you Rama,  
 Pure, valour's marvel, handsome, armed with bow,  
 The undivided Principle, honest without beginning or end,  
 I shall worship you for ever, without respite,  
 Full of devotion, always you and no one else  
 Which sacred feet the Vedas seek,  
 Which navel gave birth to Brahma,  
 Which name is chanted by great God Shiva  
 That Lord, I worship within, day by day.  
 The goddess of the word and her lord  
 Daily sing from heaven the glories of Rama,  
 The best of anodynes, the vital elixir!  
 I too seek refuge in you, Lord Rama.  
 To attain the supreme joy, free from greed and lust.  
 The first, the single, the indefinable, the carefree,  
 By none learnable yet knowable through Vedanta,  
 The supreme, the sovereign, the infinite soul, the master,  
 Well-known as Para Brahma; the embodiment of ecstasy, the lord,

The Purusha, the ancient, the radiant self,  
 The teacher of the whole universe, embodied kindness,  
 You look the most beautiful form on earth  
 To bring bliss to earth.  
 I worship for all time this Ramachandra  
 With my mind, brimming with piety.  
 Dwell in my mind, O free soul, the perfect,  
 The blissful, the joyful, of soul the diligent.  
 The one who through the magic of illusion  
 Wears all forms, and all qualities reflect,  
 O, the indivisible, beyond the world of qualities,  
 You who took the different forms of Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra  
 To create, sustain and destroy the universe,  
 You whom the Vedas praise,  
 O Rama! O Raghava! your lotus-feet I adore  
 You, the graceful one, worshipped by the petal-like hands of Lakshmi.  
 Your feet that measured with three mighty steps  
 The three worlds on a prayer from the humiliated gods,  
 The lily-like feet washed by Brahma's hands,  
 Serene, marked by the conch, the wheel, the sword and the fish,  
 Housed in my mind the balm, the anodyne,  
 The best refuge for the pure of soul, I bow to them.  
 The shelter of the worlds, why, you are the world!  
 You were the first-born of the universe.  
 In everything you dwell in detachment  
 You are the dispassionate, the world's witness.  
 You, God, indestructible, indefatigable, pure,  
 Joy of the spirit other than physical joy.

III

Sita Weds

Sage Vishwamitra leads Princes Rama and Lakshmana to the court of King Janaka at Mithila where Rama weds Sita after passing through the difficult ordeal of breaking the divine bow Triyambaka. The following passage describing the incident is from Balakanda:

Vishwamitra, the sage scaled the heights of joy  
 And told the Lord of the world these words;  
 "No time let us waste, my dear young ones,  
 In leaving for the city of Mithila.  
 Witness we shall the sacrifice first, see Lord Shiva's bow,

And then, reaching Ayodhya, shall see your father."  
 Saying these words the Ganga they crossed  
 And fast went past the city's gates.  
 Janaka, the king, he heard the news  
 That Vishwamitra of the Kaushika clan,  
 The chief of the sages, had reached his hermitage,  
 And so he in pious trepidation arrived  
 To receive him with offerings and objects of worship.  
 There the great king saw Rama and Lakshmana,  
 Cheerful and officious in the worship of the sage.  
 Seeing the princes all aglow like the sun and the moon,  
 Asked the king: "Tell me who these fair youths are:  
 Most handsome are they, worthy of the love-god's worship.  
 Are they Nara and Narayana, the gods,  
 Come in the guise of two gallant men"  
 "Trust my words, O Lord of men!" replied the sage,  
 "This is Shri Rama the eldest, and that Lakshmana, the third  
 Among the sons of Dasharatha, the valiant king.  
 To my hermitage I had them brought  
 So that they may guard my sacrifice  
 This boy, Rama, with a single arrow slew  
 Tataka, the demoness, who had stopped him in the woods,  
 Freed thus from fear did they reach my hermitage  
 And guarded my sacrifice undisturbed.  
 And with the touch of the dust of his lotus-feet  
 Ahalya he redeemed of all her sins and chastened her.  
 Eager he is to see Lord Shiva's great bow; show it, please, to him.

Hearing Vishwamitra's words Janaka worshipped him  
 As custom demanded, and pleased in mind with the princes  
 Worthy of royal reception, he commanded his minister.  
 "Go and fetch the divine bow, bring it here anon!"  
 And as the minister left, Janaka told the sage:  
 "If this young prince of Raghu's clan,  
 This fair lotus-eyed son of King Dasharatha,  
 Wields this bow and breaks its string,  
 He for sure shall my daughter wed."  
 "Only God can judge; this is all I can tell.  
 I have the bow brought here," was the sage's reply.

The king had his messengers sent  
 And the bow-bearers came with a hum.  
 Five thousand bearers together brought  
 The mighty bow of the Destroyer of Death.

"See this 'Triyambaka bow", the minister said,  
 "Bedecked with myriad bells, jewels and silks."  
 Rama saw the royal bow of Shiva, the moon-crowned God,  
 And that did he worship in perfect joy.  
 "Can you lift the bow? Wield it? Pull its string, pray?"  
 Vishwamitra hearing the questions said:  
 "All these you can; hesitate not to do what you can;  
 Good it will bring, bring marriage too."

Raghava heard the words with a gentle smile,  
 Slow of pace he went to the bow to watch it still.  
 Then with flaming verve he lifted it fast  
 And pulled its string and broke it with ease  
 The thunderous noise echoed and shook  
 The fourteen worlds and the people wondered, dazed they stood.  
 Song and dance followed and the shower of flowers;  
 Drums and flutes played and hymns went up:  
 Gods rejoiced and greeted the God of gods  
 And the fairies of Heaven in fervent zest  
 Eagerly watched the wedding festival begin,  
 Of the Lord of the whole universe.  
 Janaka embraced the world's master proud  
 And held him close in front of the whole big crowd.  
 Like serpents startled the gathered kings  
 As the bow like a thunder asunder broke.  
 Mithila's princess Sita, happy like a peahen, grew  
 Excited; and eager grew the wise sage too.

The maids and her mothers dressed the princess up  
 Golden-hued and fair Sita emerged  
 All gilt in golden silks and ornaments of gold,  
 Shy, humble, respectful, she walked slow-paced  
 Towards Rama, the lotus-eyed.  
 She garlanded him first with the blue-bells of her lovely eyes,  
 And then with the garland real that betokened the wedding.  
 In his wedding garland did young Rama shine  
 Bright like a blossom so fresh and so blue.  
 And all were aloft in the swelling sea of joy  
 As they saw the dear prince aglow,  
 A charming groom for the earth's own daughter,  
 And they sang in a chorus their hero's hymns.



### Advice to Lakshmana

Rama is denied the throne through the machinations of the ambitious queen Kaikeyi. Lakshmana, coming to know of this, flies into a rage and is bent upon correcting the wrong by the sword, if necessary. Then Rama brings him round with words of sublime wisdom. The excerpt below is from Ayodhyakanda:

Dear one, fair youth, Sumitra's son,  
 Hear my words without any rancour.  
 Since long have I known your essential core  
 And your abundant love for me that none can match.  
 No task, for sure, is beyond your strength;  
 This too I know, and yet to me listen.  
 This visible body, land, this world,  
 This wealth, this yield from the fertile field;  
 Are these the final truth? For, only then  
 Your worldly struggle you can justify  
 Or else what use do your efforts have?  
 Worldly joys like lighting go past;  
 Our life-span too is in a second lost.  
 A fleeting thing this human life is,  
 Like drops of water on a red-hot iron.  
 Like a frog trapped in the throat of a snake,  
 Pleading still for food, the world too, being devoured by the snake  
 Of time, seeks with a fickle mind the joys of the flesh.  
 Remember this: friends, woman, wealth  
 You meet them here for no more than a day.  
 Like the weary travellers who meet at an inn,  
 We meet for a while only to part too soon.  
 Like driftwood floating alone the stream,  
 We are carried too by the flow of time.  
 Transient is our attachment to home,  
 Transient our wealth, transient our youth.  
 Nuptial joy is but a passing dream and short,  
 How short is life, O, Lakshmana, when you think of it!  
 This whole little world of love and hate  
 Looks like a dream, a dream, my mate!  
 This world that looks like the city of angels  
 Is haunted forever, remember, by fools.  
 The sun who rises fast like a god  
 Vanishes equally fast into the western sea.

Then comes sleep; and lo! over the peak  
 Again comes the sun to bring the day.  
 Those who are caught in the snare of this illusion  
 Seldom think of the passage of time,  
 Nor do they see the passing of life  
 Steeped as they are in the ocean of delusion.  
 Old they grow, wrinkled and grey,  
 And still full of longings they die one day.  
 They go on seeing, and don't think, when they see,  
 Of the dark power of illusion that lures and tempts.  
 Now it is day and then comes the night  
 And the night too departs to bring back the day:  
 Caught in this cycle the stupid souls,  
 Ignorant ever of the moves of the supreme soul,  
 Unable to grasp the play of God, Time incarnate,  
 Do not ever think that their life will pass  
 Like water poured into a pitcher of clay unburnt.  
 Diseases too, those foes, shall waste  
 Our bodies for sure in mighty haste  
 And decrepitude like a tigress shall  
 Pounce on our bodies too soon.  
 Death within us hides, and with him  
 Dissolution, his companion; both await their hour.  
 The body blows up our ego,  
 And all being under its delusion think:  
 "I am Brahmin", "I am king", "I am the noble",  
 And as they these proud chants repeat  
 Beasts devour them and into excrement they turn  
 Or they simply burn and into ashes turn  
 Or under the soil into vermin turn:  
 Therefore is it evil to follow the longings of the body.  
 This body made of the elements five,  
 This union of flesh, blood and skin, of urine and seed,  
 Is nothing but an illusion, an everchanging form,  
 Impermanent, frail, fickle, ephemeral.  
 Once in a fit of physical pride  
 You even thought of setting fire to the world.  
 This too is ignorance; know this, my Lakshmana!  
 All of the world's evils come from anger  
 And anger from the consciousness of the body.  
 "I am my body", this feeling is

Ignorance real, the mother of illusions.  
"I am not body, but soul": this is  
Knowledge true, that alone slays worldly delusions.  
Ignorance is the cause of the world of illusion;  
And knowledge is its end.  
So deliverance if you desire,  
Nourish your soul with singular devotion.  
Lust, anger, longing, greed: these, know,  
Are the enemies of illumination.  
The strongest among them is anger,  
That can truly block the path of salvation.  
It is anger that drives a man to murder  
His mother, father, brother, wife or friend.  
It is anger that breeds remorse  
And our worldly bondage is anger's cause.  
Anger consumes our true mission here,  
Anger is what the wise should overcome.  
Anger is Yama, the god of death, and desire  
Is the river of Hell that floods the way.  
Happiness is Nandana, the garden of Paradise,  
And Peace Kamadhenu, the heavenly cow.  
Of it you think, and contemplate peace alone,  
And no kind of pain can ever touch you then.  
The soul is far above the body and senses  
Far above life, above intelligence.  
It is pure, intrinsic light, full delight,  
The formless eternal, the meaning and the essence;  
The changeless, ultimate, dispassionate, dense,  
The root of all things, the omnipresent,  
The witness of all, the omniscient.  
You who know the meaning, listen:  
Face this worldly destiny, come joy, come pain;  
Observe your duties in perfect honesty  
With the organs you have been given to act.  
Actions perform as practice and custom rule;  
Actions from every attachment free,  
Actions from desire for rewards free,  
And dedicate them all to the supreme soul.  
Actions won't stick to the soul that is pure.

And so follow my sense, meditate on its wisdom.  
 Give up your ego, taste the supreme bliss.  
 Banish from the mind all longing for illusion.  
 For, ego is the seat of all the perils great.

v

### The Quest for Sita

Ravana, the demon king of Lanka, abducts Sita in his air-borne chariot, in the absence of Rama who is lured away by demon Maricha, deputed by Ravana, in the guise of a golden deer. In the following excerpts from *Aryanyakanda*, the poet describes the wretched plight of Rama, wandering in search of Sita in the Dandaka forest.

Having slain with his arrow Maricha the demon  
 Who had come in the tempting guise of the golden deers.  
 Raghava, the divine, the spirit of the scriptures,  
 Sped back to his hermitage in the woods.  
 Hardly had he walked five bow-lengths  
 When he saw his brother at a short distance.  
 "What brings Lakshmana here?" thought he.  
 "My brother too does not know the reality;  
 Deceived, he too must have been, not knowing  
 The demon king has carried the illusory Sita away:  
 Who can ever get hold of the real goddess of grace?  
 The real Sita now is in the firegod's realm in Heaven,  
 But this Lakshmana should never come to know.  
 So I too shall feign sorrow like a savage illiterate  
 And travel to the demon's land in search of my fair spouse,  
 Slay Ravana with his entire evil clan  
 And go to Ayodhya back with the real Sita,  
 Now in the realm of fire, under the guise of making her  
 Swear her chastity, and then govern my land  
 For a while remaining on earth, thus *Dharma* to safeguard.  
 Born I was as man in the Sun's clan  
 As Brahma, the lotus-born, had thus prayed to me.  
 The mortals who with devotion recount or hear  
 My glorious deeds in this human guise of mine  
 Shall with no pain attain salvation for sure.  
 So let me deceive this lad, feigning sorrow  
 Like an untutored savage"— thus did he

Make up his mind and speak to his brother:

"Who is there to protect Sita in the hermitage?  
Why did you leave her alone and come here?  
The demons, who know, have carried her off,  
Even slain her and eaten, for what cannot these monsters do?"

Lakshmana in sheer agony bowed to his brother's words,  
Sobbed and in a faltering voice repeated  
The words of the divine lady which he could not grasp.  
"O Lakshmana, save me! O Sumitra's son! Quick!  
The demon will kill me now, come quick!  
These cries of the demon, the fair-bodied one  
Mistook for yours and in anguish pure  
Commanded me to go and save your life.  
No, this is not my brother's voice, I said,  
Don't be deluded, please know the truth.  
This is but the demon's disguised speech,  
Wait a minute please, I pleaded many times.  
But the divine lady, hearing my words, said  
Many a thing I loathe to repeat before your great self.  
I just covered my ears in grief,  
Prayed to the gods to look after her.  
And came here to worship your feet."

"You shouldn't have come still, Sumitra's son!  
Is it proper to doubt while even under abuse?  
Those who take women's words for true  
Are but fools, don't you ever know this?  
What have demons done to her I hardly know:  
Abducted her perchance, or devoured her alive."

Rama went, feigning these thoughts inside.  
Looked in the cottage but found her not there.  
So he, the pure, the dispassionate, the self-contented,  
In mock-anxiety began thus to a mourn:  
"Oh, Oh! my spouse! O Sita, Mithila's princess, my wife!  
O Janaka's darling daughter! O goddess! My soulmate!  
Have you gone into hiding to delude your Rama,  
Come out, out, my dear, into the light!"  
So crying he wandered along the woods,  
Sought her everywhere in panic and in pain:  
"Have you seen, O nymphs of the woods,

Sita, the lotus-eyed, pray, tell me the truth.  
 Have you spied, O herds of deer,  
 The deer-eyed daughter of Janaka, the king?  
 Have you, O flocks of birds, seen below  
 My long-eyed beauty, soon let me know.  
 O, trees in rows, where, do you know,  
 The lily-eyed has vanished so?"

Far and wide he searched raving so in grief  
 But all was in vain, nowhere was Sita seen.  
 The all-seeing, the all-knowing god of all, of all the soul,  
 The cause of all, the immutable, the perfect one,  
 The pure, the formless, the egoless, the eternal one,  
 The blissful, the indivisible, the joyful one:  
 Like a mortal did he feign grief, the supreme,  
 The essence of all acts acted so to seem a fool.  
 How would the truly wise from all blindness free  
 Ever in their minds feel grief or glee?

*vi*

### The Burning of Lanka

Hanuman, the monkey-warrior, deputed by Rama in search of Sita reaches Lanka, the capital of Ravana, where he finds her in the Ashoka grove. After consoling her with words of cheer, Hanuman goes to Ravana's court where he creates havoc by words and deeds. The distraught Ravana orders his attendants to set fire to Hanuman's tail. The excerpt below from Sundarakanda describes the burning of the City of Lanka.

"Valour, for monkeys, dwells not in their face  
 Nor in their limbs; in their tail it lies.  
 Come, let his tail in cloth be wrapped.  
 Set fire to it, and beating your drums take him round  
 And proclaim, aloud, demons, for all to hear  
 In all the directions: 'The thief is here!  
 He entered our city under cover of the night,  
 A blot to his race, and powerless to boot.'  
 The monkeys will then ostracize him."  
 As they began to wrap around his tail in glee  
 Clothes wet with oil and ghee,  
 The mighty Hanuman sat on still,  
 Undaunted like a Himalayan hill.

The cloth they had soon came to an end.  
 And yet the naked tail remained.  
 All the palace-silks they brought  
 And round the obstinate tail wound;  
 That too didn't help; the tail remained still;  
 So they went round the land and wrapped  
 Clothes of all kinds, divine silk and velvet soft  
 Round the tail, all in gingelly oil and in ghee dipped.  
 The arrogance grew; no piece of cloth,  
 No drop of oil was left in the land.  
 "Enough, enough, enough! A god he is;  
 We are sure ruined! Cursed be the one,  
 Who conceived this thought!", so muttered some.  
 "Enough; clothes we have no more!  
 Set fire to the tail, delay no more!  
 They lost no time—the thieves, they lit  
 The tip of the tail with a burning torch;  
 Bound the godly ape tight with a rope,  
 And hurled insults at him, called him a thief,  
 Beat their drums and took him round the streets.  
 As they reached the city's western gate  
 The wind's son made himself thin  
 That broke the rope; free he grew,  
 And strong like a mountain; then with all his might  
 Leapt up very high killing his carriers all.  
 Fast like a storm he sped towards the tower,  
 Where the sun set, and sat on its jewelled top  
 That almost touched the moon in the sky.  
 Now from housetop to housetop he jumped  
 In leaps and bounds so fast he went,  
 The son of the wind, lo! he burnt down  
 Every gilded palace, every house of jade.  
 The fire grew and with instinctive mischief  
 Began he to burn down all dwellings gem-bedecked,  
 All the beautiful courts through whose great gates  
 Horses, elephants, chariots and armies used to pass.  
 The flames of fire and the heart of Hanuman  
 Alike leapt up in joy: one reached the sky, the other Rama's feet.  
 Eager to convey to the king of gods in heaven the news  
 Of the burning down of the city of the demons,  
 The flames of fire went flying to the sky  
 Each telling itself "I shall be the first to do it".  
 The city of Lanka, once so rich and so full

Of the purest and holiest gems of the earth,  
 Though gutted by the fire set by the son of the wind-god  
 Looked rich once again, this time with ash and soot;  
 All the houses of the foes of God fire consumed  
 Only one, that of the pious Vibhishana was spared.  
 Maruti, the dear servant of Rama, the head of Raghu's clan,  
 Saved from fire the dwelling of Ravana's brother.  
 Women's sad screams rent the air  
 As the gilded palaces began to burn.  
 Their hair, their clothes, their limbs all burnt  
 Lifeless they fell one by one to the ground.  
 Bodies melting in fire, they groped and shrieked,  
 And sought refuge in the tallest of towers.  
 The fire followed them there too like fate  
 And they fell down and, writhing and wriggling died.  
 "My son! My husband! My father! My life-mate!  
 O Gods of Heaven! Is this our fate?  
 I melt here in death's embrace tight;  
 Not a soul arrives to save me from my fate;  
 O Shiva! Shiva! the demon king's creation  
 This misery is; no other cause it can have.  
 That ten-faced monster, the sinner, took  
 Another's wealth and spouse by force  
 Let no one do in sheer arrogance  
 Such improper things; bitter shall be its consequences.  
 This terrible sinner; a human female he went after  
 And brought to all this terrible disaster.  
 Let the wise take care to sift and to know  
 Good deeds from bad and proper from improper  
 This fiend made fickle by carnal lust,  
 Carried away by force a woman of character,  
 Another's spouse, serene and devout;  
 Thus he her chastity abused.  
 It's the pure sacrificial fire of her mind  
 That has now grown wild and engulfed this land."

So on and on the demonesses raved,  
 And were charred to death wherever they stood.  
 Some ran for shelter helter-skelter,  
 While trees were falling, scorched and burnt.  
 Happy was the God of Fire, having his fill,  
 As Rama's dear messenger in a second turned  
 The seven hundred leagues of the demon's land



Into a splendid many-coursed dinner for him.  
 And then the wind's offspring in ease perfect  
 Smote his tail on the surging sea to put it out.  
 Not a wee bit of heat the wind's son felt;  
 How could fire ever burn his dearest friend?  
 Wasn't Janaki, Rama's chaste wife, too  
 Praying for him with her pitiful heart?  
 For him the fire was gently cool  
 By the grace of Sita, Earth's daughter  
 Attached though to their wealth and women and sons,  
 People cross the fire of the three-fold sorrow  
 With the name of Rama, the greatest of fires,  
 That burnt the forest of the demon's race.  
 And how can his messenger who follows his desire  
 Ever suffer from the common fire?  
 Let all men worship Rama the lotus-eyed  
 So that they too may similarly be blessed.  
 Let the Lord of the worlds, who sleeps on the serpent-king,  
 The spirit that pervades all, assuage my pains.

Now the monkey-king, bending low, bowed  
 To the feet of Earth's daughter and piously said;  
 "Now to the other shore let me go,  
 To Rama's presence by your command.  
 Return I will with Rama, his brother and Sugriva  
 Quickly with that god's own battalion.  
 Be calm, worry not a bit, O mother!  
 Now it's my mission, Janaka's daughter!"  
 Sita listened to these modest words so piously said  
 And in profound sorrow to him replied;  
 "My grief is gone now that I have seen  
 You who brought to me the tale of my lord;  
 But tell me, son, should I here live on yet,  
 Bereft of the joy of getting news of him?"  
 Hearing these tearful words of King Janaka's daughter  
 Hanuman said in pity and prayer:  
 "Throw away, quick, your separation's grief,  
 Here, mount my shoulders, in a moment brief  
 You shall reach your lord and with him unite;  
 And thus shall your heart's agony end."

Pleased with these words of Hanuman, the son of the wind,  
 "Now I know for sure" Vaidehi said,

“It isn’t difficult for you at all as one may think,  
 But let my sacred lord show all his might  
 And with his divine arrow dry up or dam the sea,  
 Cross it with his strong array of valiant apes  
 Kill this villain, this worst of the three worlds,  
 And then take me back with him.  
 Carrying me in secret under cover of night and sleep,  
 Will diminish and defile my lord’s great glory,  
 Let the noblest of Raghu’s clan here come  
 And, waging war, slay the demon and me retrieve.  
 Work hard to this end, my dear son,  
 I shall manage to keep alive until then.”

With these words of kindness did  
 Sita bid farewell to the son of the wind,  
 Who in return, bowing, bade goodbye  
 To that great mother of all and leapt across the sea.

*vii*

The Killing of Ravana

The mighty battle of Lanka, where Rama and Ravana, the two redoubtable warrior-kings, one representing the forces of good and the other of evil, enter into a deadly combat, is vividly described in the following passage taken from Yuddhakanda. Ravana ultimately is slain and Rama orders for him a royal funeral, befitting a valiant hero.

“Forward, fear not; let the chariot go”,  
 Rama commanded Matali, the charioteer.  
 Matali increased the chariot’s speed;  
 Still undaunted the ten-faced demon stood.  
 All directions were covered with dust,  
 And arrows met high in the sky.  
 Dasharatha’s son broke the demon’s flagstaff  
 And to the ground he threw it fast.  
 The lord of the demons aimed his arrows at the horses  
 And Matali, the charioteer, too.  
 He began to shower spears,  
 Batons and clubs, one after another,  
 Shooting thousands of arrows, lo! Rama  
 Broke them all, and came close to the foe.

"Coming near, going far, moving round  
 Pushing forward, marching left and drawing back,  
 Never before did we have a chance  
 Nor ever again shall have, to see  
 Such strategic skill of charioteers;  
 Such battling art of soldiers brave":  
 So remarked the gods in praise.  
 Elated, Narada cried, "Encore, encore."  
 The people of all the three worlds trembled in terror  
 To see what by the two warring kings was wrought.  
 The winds grew still and the sun set,  
 The earth shook and the sea was beset with turmoil,  
 The people of the netherworld were all atremble:  
 "Oceans may fight oceans and the sky, the sky,  
 They won't equal this war between the two kings high.  
 No parallel this battle has in history,"  
 So went on and on in praise the gods.  
 While Rama chopped off one of the demon's heads  
 And flung it down on the ground, but lo!  
 It grew again, and again it was plucked;  
 That too appeared again and was again removed:  
 Thus Rama reaped a hundred heads and one.  
 And still remained in tact all his heads ten  
 How strange, how rare this feat of the demon!  
 A thousand heads he may thus lose  
 Yet all the ten remained always:  
 What blessing, and what penance!  
 How strong he is, this demon-king!  
 "Many an evil demon my arrows have slain:  
 Kumbhakarna, Makaraksha, Khara, Bali.  
 The mighty Maricha and more of the kind;  
 Why do they fail before this evil fiend?  
 How do I kill this ten-headed monster, Lord!"

Lamenting so again, Rama showered  
 Arrows galore over the demon's body;  
 So did Ravana too at the god of gods.  
 Rama now had a thought within,  
 With arrows struck all over him:  
 With that they all into flowers turned  
 And the demon's strength began to ebb:  
 For seven days they fought thus in wrath  
 And now the charioteer said in pious faith:

"Don't take it to heart; slay him you can,  
 With the arrow given in homage to you  
 By Agastya the sage, use that Brahma's arrow."  
 Rama hearing Matali's words said thus:  
 "Good it was that you told me this;  
 Now shall I slay Ravana, doubtless."  
 With these words, with all his skill  
 Brahma's arrow Raghava shot.  
 He chanted the *mantra* in pious faith  
 And sent the arrow, whose luminous glow  
 Lit up the universe far and wide;  
 Whose hilt was formed by the sun and fire,  
 Whose feather was air and centre  
 Formed by the mounts Mandara and Meru.  
 Piercing Ravana's heart, the arrow  
 Darted across the earth, washed off the blood in the sea  
 And flew back fast like a storm to fall back  
 In Raghava's quiver; a miracle indeed!

And the demon from his chariot fell to the ground  
 Like an uprooted gigantic tree.  
 The fresh flowers of the heavenly tree of wishfulfilment  
 The gods showered many a time in earnest glee  
 On the brow of the one born in the solar dynasty.  
 Indra's eyes—all of them—grew wide and clear;  
 Brahma, the lotus-born was all cheer;  
 The sun rose bright in the sky, blue, clear  
 The breeze began to gently blow  
 And all the fourteen worlds were aglow.  
 The sages too were cheered up, all  
 Their melancholy gone, at the victory-call.  
 The demons that remained, haunted by fears.  
 Fled to their homes and shed bitter tears,  
 Maruti, Neel, Angad and other monkeys, brave and strong,  
 Cheered the triumphant Rama and his praises sang.

Vibhishana seeing his brother fall so,  
 Kneled before him in pain and grief,  
 And in bereavement began to mourn:  
 "It is all the hand work of fate,  
 Many a time did I warn you; yet  
 Too proud you were to listen, and now

You leave me thus, my valiant one,  
 Fit to be the greatest of all.  
 You now have to lie so low on earth.  
 God's will it is that I should see this;  
 Who can escape the divine designs?"

To Vibhishana who was weeping so,  
 The god of gods in reverence said:  
 "Valiant was he, a hero true,  
 Who fought me face to face and bravely died.  
 Weep not for him; it won't do him good  
 In his passage to Heaven, for 'tis the task  
 Of heroic kings to die in battle straight.  
 Only the virtuous shall have the chance  
 To attain the Heaven of Heroes dying in war.  
 Your brother is free from sin; come,  
 Delay not, begin the funeral rites."

As Rama there stood saying this,  
 Mandodari, reached there crying aloud,  
 Falling on the chest of Lanka's king in tears  
 Hoping against hope, raving and ranting in pain;  
 The other women too now joined in.  
 Dasharatha's son politely told Ravana's brother:  
 "Quickly make the pyre for Ravana  
 And burn his body, lose no time."  
 "Not me", Vibhishana said, "For, none on earth  
 Has committed as much sin as he".

Now with added respect Rama said:  
 "The demon king stands redeemed  
 Since he died of my arrow  
 Death spells the end of enmities too.  
 So perform his rites as meet;  
 Let his soul salvation find;  
 That to you would do no harm."  
 Now with the help of sages great  
 He made the pyre with sandalwood,  
 Adorned with silk, jewels and gold,  
 And garlands gay, the king who was dead.

Then with the beating of drums he took him to the pyre  
 And burnt his brother's mortal frame  
 Like burning the holiest of holy Brahmins

And then his brother's rites performed.  
 Women, relieved after grieving for long,  
 Came to worship Rama's feet.  
 Matali now bowed to the Lord,  
 And went back in joy to his heavenly abode.  
 And those who had come just to witness the war  
 Dispersed too for their distant homes.

From *Adhyatma Ramayanam*, 16th century

Tr. by K. Satchidanandan

## 2

### Mahabharatam

*Mahabharatam* (Mahābhāratam) in Malayalam written by Thunchathu Ezhuthacchan is an abridged version of the original Sanskrit text which consists of 125000 verses. The abridged translation consists of 25000 lines. If four lines of the translation are taken as equivalent to one verse of the original, it comes to 6250 verses approximately, which is less than one-twentieth. Ezhuthacchan's achievement is miraculous as he has succeeded in conveying the grandeur, sublimity, message, essence and significance of all the important stories and sub-stories. No other poet in Malayalam, earlier or later, has been able to enter straight into the minds of thousands of readers of successive generations. It looks as though apt words awaited a signal from him to flow into the lines. Ezhuthacchan is uniformly efficacious in the depiction of the diverse variety of sentiments. The descriptions of fierce battles are to be specially mentioned. Alliteration and other rhymes are used profusely, with the invariable aim of creating the right mood and enhancing the emotional effect, but never at the expense of the sense. Ezhuthacchan did not translate any verse verbatim from the original Mahabharata. He created the total effect by narrating the stories in his own original way.

Seven excerpts from the text are given here:

## i

### Invocation

The following extract from the Sambhava Parva typifies the narrative device employed by Ezhuthacchan at the beginning of each of the Parvas (Sections or Cantos) or Mahabharata. The narrator is the bird, perhaps a symbolic representation of the poet's own creativity, whom he entreats to retell the eternal story of the Mahabharata composed originally by Vedavyasa. Through a profuse employment of choice epithets, Ezhuthacchan invokes the blessings of the Lord, which happens to be a recurring feature at the start of each Parva.

O! Sree Rama, Rama, Rama, Govinda, Sivarama  
 O! Sree Mahadeva, Krishna, Mukunda, Narayana,  
 Praise be to you O Narayana,  
 Praise be to you O Narayana.  
 God of gods! Creator of the fourteen worlds,  
 Show me the path I pray to you  
 To surmount the great sorrows  
 Of Birth and Death,  
 Living the lives of birds and beasts.  
 The best and surest path, my Guru has advised me,  
 Is imbibing, in all its essence,  
 The great epic Mahabharata,  
 Listening, retelling and repeating.  
 Hence tell me, O narrator-birdie,  
 The superb story; easy it is for you:  
 You know it all by heart.  
 The birdie says: "May sage Vyasa, son of Parasara,  
 Bless me with the talent to narrate it!  
 May the supreme Goddess Saraswati  
 Grace my tongue with her divine presence!  
 Mahabharata is an endless ocean of stories.  
 But you are here anxious to undertake the voyage.  
 So shall I try to take up the venture."

"We are all ears. Lord Krishna has said  
 That the surest of paths to lead to deliverance  
 Is this indeed. We are ready to listen  
 And thus be rid of every sin.  
 Tell us the story as told by Vedavyasa;  
 It is the quintessence of Vedanta.  
 Tell us from the very beginning  
 And immerse us in the total bliss."

"Then listen; a pleasure it is  
 To narrate the story right from the beginning.  
 I invoke the richly benevolent blessings  
 Of my guru, of the gods Ganapati, Krishna,  
 And Saraswati, of the kind-hearted Brahmins too,  
 At whose lotus-feet I seek refuge.  
 I pray to the great grandson of Vasishtha's son  
 And to sage Valmiki, for their benign presence within me,  
 So that the truly devoted may find

Enjoyable this narration of mine.  
 In case it proves otherwise for some  
 Who might sneer at me  
 This consolation there is:  
 It will alleviate the burden of my sins.  
 The rest of life can surely be enriched  
 By meditation, by the invocation of the names and glories  
 Of God, by the narration of stories of god and His devotees.  
 Nothing can you find elsewhere  
 That is not found in this Mahabharata:  
 So vast is the world of stories in this  
 That none but Vyasa can do  
 Full justice to its narration.  
 The sage called it the fifth Veda.  
 The magnitude of the task I undertake  
 Is forbidding: so small am I  
 That I feel diffident at the very thought.  
 Yet, the wise advise us:  
 Being true to oneself and attaining self-enlightenment  
 One can enlighten others.  
 Therefore, lend me your ears.  
 Be good enough to recognize the worth  
 And ignore the drawbacks.

## *ii*

### The Birth of Vyasa

Vyasa, the composer of the epic, also plays the role of protagonist in the epic. He thus narrates the strange story of his birth and parentage in the following extract from the Sambhava Parva.

The damsel Kali came of age;  
 She turned out to be a ravishing beauty.  
 Mature she was, and she took up the family profession  
 Of rowing the boat to take people across Kalindi.  
 Passengers coming to cross the river  
 Were enraptured to find the girl at the helm.  
 One day Sage Parasara arrived  
 To cross the river before dawn.  
 He was captivated by her charm.  
 No woman on earth could have such beauty;



Her high lineage was consequential.  
 As the rays of the rising sun spread  
 He watched the girl standing at a distance  
 With the paddle in hand and ready for work.  
 Shattered was the ascetic's self-control.  
 Said he, "Come near; none else is here;  
 Launch the boat at once  
 I must reach the other bank  
 In time to perform the morning rites.  
 But before that, I yearn for your company  
 Struck by the love-god am I;  
 Your red lips and the round full breasts  
 Are irresistible. Embrace me at once;  
 'The stars' position is such  
 That it makes our union inevitable.  
 This is God's will; none can prevent it  
 Even Brahma is incapable of subduing the god of love."  
 The lovely maid Kali said:  
 "Lo! there are sages and the wise  
 On both banks. And kindly reckon,  
 I am a virgin not to be molested.  
 Moreover, who am I? A mere untouchable,  
 Whereas you are a great ascetic.  
 Great penance has earned you  
 Immense spiritual powers.  
 You are an immaculate voyager to immortality.  
 We, ignorant folk, fish-eaters,  
 Cannot distinguish between the right and the wrong;  
 We belong to the low-caste;  
 You are high-born and are makers of tenets.  
 How could a great one of your status  
 Express a desire of this sort!  
 It confuses me. It is God's will?  
 I have no powers to question you;  
 I shall submit myself to your wishes.  
 Provided no one else knows of it;  
 And no harm comes to us both.  
 It is not for me to refute  
 Such a venerable great person."

The sage was quite pleased  
 And said, "You will regain virginity.

Be confident. All is for the good.  
 I want to have you now and here.  
 It is destined to be so.  
 Now, be kind to me, pretty girl."  
 In an instant, the sage created a thick mist  
 Around them and none could see through it.  
 He willed it so that the fish odour was gone from her  
 And the fragrance of musk emanated instead.  
 Indeed, the company of the good brings forth good.  
 He created an island in midstream  
 And her wonder knew no bounds.  
 Why elaborate it? While everyone worshipped the dawn  
 In the holy river Yamuna,  
 The love-god-stricken sage who knew  
 The distinction between worldly ties and deliverance  
 Embraced the virgin fisher-woman.  
 When the sun was rising over the water  
 The sage in amorous ecstasy  
 Lustfully embraced her breasts.  
 Reluctance gone, the girl was all willing,  
 For this was God's will, she thought  
 She conceived, a boy was born;  
 He grew into a youth in a trice.  
 Being born in a *Dveep* or island  
 He was known as "Dvaipayana"; and as he dwelt in the island  
 In the land of Badara trees  
 He got the name Badarayana too.  
 Bidding farewell he told his mother;  
 "Think of me when you are in need of help;  
 I will be there to solve your problems."  
 Then the son walked off; penance was his aim.  
 Sage Parasara also went his way.  
 The girl regained her virginity, the membrane unbroken.  
 But the fragrance of her body lasted for ever.  
 So it is: union with the virtuous  
 Breeds fair and foul; the fair stays while the foul fades away.  
 Nothing so good as the union with the good  
 Four-legged Dharma loses one leg in every epoch;  
 Likewise the life-span, vigour, and intelligence of man,  
 All get reduced as the ages roll on,  
 Making men incapable of learning the Vedas in toto.  
 Sage Dvaipayana, therefore, divided and classified them into four,  
 And thus he acquired the name "Vyasa",  
 Not stopping with that, he wrote the Puranas

To highlight the inner meanings of the Vedas.  
 Eminent Brahmins came to him  
 To be his devoted disciples,  
 Four of them were outstanding:  
 To each he imparted one of the four Vedas;  
 Sumanta, Jaimini, Paila and Suka  
 Came to be the four authorities,  
 Exponents of Mantras, Sutras and Brahmanas.  
 A fifth disciple there was, Vaishampayana,  
 Whom he taught Mahabharata, the fifth Veda.  
 The epics and the puranas were taught  
 To the brilliant Suta who became their exponent.  
 Vedavyasa was part of Vishnu;  
 Dark-hued he was and hence called Krishna.  
 Thus Krishna, Dwaipayana, Vyasa  
 Parasharya, Krishnadwaipayana and Vedavyasa  
 Badarayana, too, were all the sage's names.  
 The hidden meaning of Vedanta  
 Dawned as a revelation  
 On this the greatest of the great ancestors  
 Immaculate is this great author of Mahabharata:  
 The humblest mind of mine  
 Buried deep in darkness and illusion  
 Was elevated by his compassion and benevolence:  
 All enlightenment I owe to this great one indeed!

iii

### Shakuntala and Dushyanta

One among the several episodes in the epic is Shakuntala, subsequently immortalised by Kalidasa in his drama *Abhijnana Shakuntala*. The following passage is an eloquent plea for justice and fairplay by Shakuntala when she finds the king Dushyanta forsaking her, feigning ignorance of their relation.

When lovely Shakuntala with her son,  
 Walked in slowly, casting curious glances around  
 All were stunned by the captivating personality  
 Of the boy. "Who can this be?  
 The Moon? The king of gods? The love-god?  
 Skanda, the son of Shiva? Krishna, or Shiva himself?  
 Can any one tell?" They inquired among themselves  
 In happy wonderment.

The sages and disciples who escorted her  
 Decided it proper not to enter the city,  
 So Shakuntala and her son  
 Arrived unaccompanied  
 At the court of the great king.  
 The citizens watched her with great respect.  
 Her husband sat there like Lord Indra;  
 She paid him due respects in her mind.  
 Hearing her mother's words, "Darling,  
 Now bow and prostrate at your father's feet",  
 The son obeyed her forthwith,  
 And stood up eyeing the great man  
 From head to foot in wonder.  
 Those assembled also sat in bewilderment  
 And said approvingly, "A good boy indeed!"  
 The king turned to her and said,  
 "O hermitess! what can I do for you?  
 You and your son: What gift do you expect?  
 Tell me with no hesitation;  
 Granted it will be; no doubt."  
 Shakuntala then spoke:  
 "O king! accept your son;  
 I gave him birth, you are his father.  
 Now he has come of age;  
 He should be accepted and honoured  
 As heir apparent as your promised,  
 You appear to have forgotten me.  
 Have you forgotten the solemn oath,  
 The word you gave me at the time of your visit  
 To the hermitage of Sage Kanva  
 And took me as your wedded wife?"

Forthwith came the reply: "I don't remember it at all.  
 Indeed it is a story cleverly concocted.  
 This is an august assembly:  
 Don't profane it with such falsehood.  
 Remain or leave as you choose,  
 But to tell lies you have no licence."

At those unbelievable words  
 She was shocked and sad.  
 She shrunk into sorrowful shame.  
 Like a stone statue she stood for a moment.

Only for a moment; and then burst into a rage,  
 Her eyes grew red,  
 In righteous indignation  
 Her body attained a new radiance  
 Burning like the sun she stood;  
 Her lips trembled, eyes emitted sparks:  
 It looked the king would turn into ashes.  
 Thus she stood for quite some time  
 Then, emotions subdued, composure regained,  
 She spoke at length to the king in sadness:  
 "How could you throw such words at my face?  
 Think, O king, it is obvious you haven't forgotten it all.  
 None is so sinful as he who indulges  
 In self-deception. You must know  
 That for all the deeds one does,  
 The watchful eyes of fourteen forces  
 Bear witness in the universe:  
 The sun, the moon, the fire, the wind,  
 The sky, the earth, water, heart, yama,  
 The day, the night, the dawn, the dusk and Dharma.  
 And still against your own self  
 If you have the audacity to disown me  
 In this august assembly, like a savage.  
 May your head be shattered to pieces!  
 Noble men never break their word.  
 Think for a while, recollect the wise words  
 Of great mentors, O king of kings!  
 The word *putra* means one who redeems his father  
 From the hell called "Pum",  
 So it is proclaimed, by Lord Brahma,  
 Through sons fathers gain deliverance;  
 Through grandsons grandfathers too;  
 And the great grandfathers through their great grandsons.  
 The real wife is she who is an able house-wife,  
 The real wife is she who begets good sons,  
 The real wife is she whose life-breath is the husband,  
 The real wife is she who pleases the guests,  
 The wife is the real better-half for man  
 The wife is the true friend for him, O king!  
 The wife is the means for attaining Dharma, Artha and Kama;  
 The wife is essential for performing sacrificial rites;  
 The wife is the strong link of relationships.

Possessors of wives are masters of houses;  
 Possessors of wives are happy and gay  
 Possessors of wives enjoy steady riches;  
 The consort relieves the husband's loneliness;  
 The consort cooperates in all endeavours;  
 The consort always talks pleasing things.  
 Man supported by wife is deemed faithful;  
 Man approved by wife has the voice of validity.  
 Man strengthened by wife attains salvation too.  
 Women of noble descent go to hell  
 And spoil the family, adulterous if they be.  
 Sons begotten by other men  
 Are bastards indeed in every sense.  
 Such sons are one's born enemies;  
 They will ill-treat fathers, call them worthless oldies,  
 And defy them in utter disobedience.  
 Under the pretext of taking care  
 They will cause woes and cares.  
 "We did not ask you to give us birth;  
 Then why did this fellow punish us?  
 Lured by the woman, the so-called mother.  
 You satisfied your inordinate lust.  
 Born as victims of lust and passion  
 We are; and now you come to us,  
 Holding forth scriptures and strictures?"  
 Thus the sons of ignoble birth will lash out  
 At the father, who, despite the insult,  
 Will bring them up as duty-bound.  
 See the ants, they carefully gather the eggs;  
 The crows look after even the cuckoo's eggs.  
 Mistaking them for their own offspring.  
 And here you are, omniscient,  
 Yet discarding your worthy son.  
 More refreshing than sandal-paste to the body.  
 Is the touch of a son that melts and thrills.  
 Satin-skinned harlots, the finest silk,  
 Clusters of precious jewels: there  
 Give tactile joy, but far above this is  
 The unique delight one gets  
 From embracing one's own son.  
 Among the bipeds the Brahmin is supreme,  
 Among the quadrupeds, the cow is the holiest,

Among the holy seers, the Guru is the greatest,  
 Among the merciful, Lord Krishna is the highest,  
 Among the tactile objects, a son is the finest.  
 Now experience the bliss of touch right now.  
 All humans acquire this absolute happiness  
 Kissing the forehead of the son, O king of kings!  
 You are an enlightened person, not a fool;  
 The vedic hymn of Jatakarma on birth ceremony,  
 Is not unknown to you.  
 Hunting wild animals in the forest,  
 You entered the hermitage and married me;  
 Of the six celestial damsels  
 Urvashi, Poorvachithi, Sahajanya  
 Menaka, Vishwachi and Ghruchi  
 The most wonderful and loveliest  
 Menaka, daughter of Brahma,  
 Is my mother, remember that.  
 My father is Vishwamitra, O king,  
 Whose lineage is well-known,  
 Brahma's son Kusha,  
 Kusha's son Kushanabha, his son Gathi,  
 Gathi's son Vishwamitra: his daughter am I."

Thus spoke Shakuntala and much more:  
 No time there is to narrate all.  
 Let this pass; now listen to what  
 The king said to that virtuous lady:  
 "Women are defiant by nature, so I have heard,  
 But saw it for myself only now.  
 A harlot of your sort daring in my court  
 To argue and convince me of your noble descent;  
 Enough is enough.  
 I shall give him, and you too  
 As much gold, jewels and pearls as you want:  
 Take them all; do not tarry afterwards.  
 Don't waste time lingering here.  
 I shall pardon your audacity.  
 And your shameless words uttered in this august assembly  
 No wonder, women are called "Vamas"  
 Lustful are they by nature;  
 Led by others are most of them;  
 Wavering at heart blind to reason, anger-stricken.  
 Truth they never utter;

Don't bring ignominy to sage Kanva's name.  
 Your mother Menaka is a mere harlot.  
 She abandoned her offspring like a used garland.  
 Like the cuckoo, you are a foster-child;  
 Begone out of my sight,  
 Ensnaring lecherous enchantress!"

Thus he spoke with utter contempt.  
 Hearing the insult, and overcome by shame,  
 Beautiful Shakuntala spoke again:  
 "You spot out the mustard-size blemish in others,  
 But are blind to your own elephant-sized vices,  
 A habit that goes even with the scholars, indeed!  
 But mind you, I am of a nobler lineage.  
 You are earth-bound, your legs planted on the soil.  
 But I can move about on earth and heaven as well.  
 Yes, the distance between us is indeed great.  
 You may ponder over it, O king of kings!  
 The difference is as between Mount Meru and a mustard seed.  
 You seem to know little, O ruler of the earth,  
 Such nonsense you wouldn't have uttered  
 In the benign presence of the learned,  
 Had you possessed an iota of sense and discretion.  
 Your great ancestor, "Ayus" by name,  
 None was there to excel him in greatness, yet  
 Haven't you heard the story of his birth?  
 He was son of Pururavas, the great king of the lunar dynasty  
 And his mother Urvashi, the celestial nymph.  
 Forget not, among valiant kings and holy sages,  
 Several are sons of celestial nymphs.  
 The mother's lineage caused no blemish to them;  
 O king! think for a moment to realise the truth.  
 The ugly fondle the illusion that they are charming  
 Until a mirror is held up to them.  
 Blind to their own defects, they magnify the faults of others.  
 The really blemishless ones do not condemn  
 Even the faulty due to their own virtues.  
 Only a dust-bath makes the elephant happy;  
 After the daily ablutions in fresh water.  
 The wicked find pleasure in deriding the virtuous  
 Yet the virtuous do not disdain the evil-minded.  
 The dogs are not content with milk and meat;  
 They take delight in eating faeces.



The man who discards truth and Dharma  
 Is a greater terror than a serpent angered.  
 Even for atheists dreadful they are,  
 Needless to say how much more for the pious  
 Kali, the devil, finds his dwelling  
 In the bosom of atheist liars  
 Inaccessible to him are they  
 Who are virtuous in deed and pure in thought.  
 The learned sort out the good things from the bad;  
 The wicked grasp the bad things tight.  
 Give the pig rice and faeces alongside,  
 It prefers eating faeces and leaves out rice.  
 Give the swan milk and water mixed,  
 It separates milk and drinks it, leaving water.  
 So it is with the virtuous who absorb good alone;  
 The evil men brand the virtuous as wicked,  
 And proclaim themselves as the ideal models.  
 No need for one to go on at length:  
 The essence of truth I shall reveal;  
 Lend me your ears, if you please;  
 A pond is worth a hundred wells,  
 A sacrifice is worthier than a hundred ponds,  
 And a son worthier than a hundred sacrifices;  
 Truth is far above a hundred sons.  
 The story goes that Brahma weighed  
 A thousand horse-sacrifices and one truth;  
 The truth was found weightier;  
 O king! there is nothing to equal truth.  
 Recite all the Vedas daily  
 And take bath in the waters of all holy rivers;  
 All this won't equal one-thousandth part of truth;  
 There is no Dharma to excel truth.  
 Deduce from this the effect of falsehood;  
 O king, you know it well; no need for my words."

Thus she spoke and lo! the Heavens approved.  
 The voice of gods came from the Void:  
 "Accept your son and the daughter of Kaushika  
 Who equals a goddess in all respects."  
 The voice said "Bhara", and hence he was known  
 As Bharata, as willed by the gods.  
 And the king was immensely happy

To accept her in festivity.  
 Shakuntala lived long and happily with her husband.  
 The king reigned for a long time,  
 And Bharata was crowned in due time.  
 When life on earth ended  
 Dushyanta reached heaven and enjoyed the company of nymphs  
 Excluding, of course *Menaka*, the mother.

*iv*

### Bhagavad Gita

As part of the transcreation process adopted by Ezhuthacchan while composing Mahabharata, he vividly describes Arjuna's predicament on the battlefield, but desists from translating even a single passage from the Bhagavad Gita which he summarises thus "And then the Lord revealed the supreme spiritual truth to Partha". The following excerpt is from Bhishma Parva:

Arjuna told the lotus-eyed Krishna:  
 "O merciful one! Kindly take the chariot forward;  
 Let me see the enemies nearer;  
 Those warriors who have come,  
 Abandoning sons, wealth, home and all,  
 Regarding everything as mortal,  
 Risking life and ready to embrace death in war  
 For the sake of one person, Suyodhana,  
 Number one among scoundrels."

Krishna drove the chariot to the central spot;  
 On two sides stood the valiant warriors,  
 Ready to begin the battle at the signals.  
 Among them were friends, brothers, their sons,  
 Venerable teachers and great grandfathers.  
 Arjuna, the son of Indra, was terribly moved:  
 Upset by surging emotions of pity,  
 He said: "O my Lord! Kindly turn the chariot back  
 And stop it off the line.  
 Tell me Lord! how can I pierce  
 The bodies of my gurus with sharpest arrows?  
 My arrows penetrating into them; how atrocious it is!  
 O Lord Shiva, O Lord Shankara!  
 I have cherished too great an ambition?

No; I can never commit this grave sin  
Of the murder of my mentors: O Madhava!  
Won't you kindly turn back the chariot?"

Crying out thus, Arjuna dropped his weapons.  
Piteously pleading with Krishna, the destroyer of demons,  
He was there on the floor of the chariot  
All vigour lost, a monument of melancholy.  
The Lord who indulges in the eternal play  
Of creating and destroying the Universe,  
For whom the sea is the abode for sleep,  
Said, "Don't be silly; it does not behove you.  
Certain it is, the kings will sneer at you.  
This is most unbecoming of a Kshatriya.  
Eternal infamy will descend on you.  
Kshatriyas are born to fight.  
Fleeing away in cowardice takes them to hell."  
And then the Lord revealed  
The supreme spiritual truth to Arjuna;  
To impart to him strength and conviction  
The Lord of the Universe, the never-born, the Immaculate  
Revealed his Vishwarupa, the cosmic form.  
All the three worlds, the gods and the demons,  
Men and birds and beasts and snakes,  
Innumerable faces, hands and legs,  
Arjuna was bewildered and mystified.  
With folded hands, he fell prostrate  
Before the incomprehensible manifestation.  
Terror-stricken, he prayed  
For refuge, prostrating himself again and again.  
And then he heard the voice of the Lord,  
The compassionate divine utterances:  
"O, the brave descendant of Kurus, worry not.  
All that you saw is my own self.  
Be not frightened."

Thus spoke Krishna, the vanquisher of Madhu;  
To Arjuna, the son of Indra, so that  
All his apprehensions were obliterated.  
And the Maya vanquished.  
The message thus imparted in supreme earnest  
Was the essence of all Upanishads.

The extensive discourse made on the spot  
Was named *Gita* by the sages.  
All the doubts and waverings vanished;  
The undaunted warrior regained self-possession  
Taking up the cast-off weapons, he  
Rose to his feet, ready to fight.

v

### The Death of Abhimanyu

The powerful style of narration, employed by Ezhuthacchan while dealing with the heroic confrontations on the Kurukshetra battlefield, is exemplified in the following passage from Drona Parva, which describes the death of Abhimanyu after a mighty struggle.

Beholding the turn of battle,  
Where Pandavas were facing a set-back,  
Yudhishthira proclaimed:

"This show-down will be reversed  
By Abhimanyu, son of Arjuna and nephew of Krishna.  
He equals them in prowess.  
The enemies have built up  
A formidable battalion formation;  
It has to be shattered for us to win.  
Arjuna, the unbeatable in war,  
Is constrained to fight at a distant spot.  
My dear boy, valiant son of Subhadra,  
You equal Kumar, the son of Shiva.  
Drona is throwing the challenge;  
Not to respond will be shameful.  
You are here to save my prestige,  
Chip of the old block, your father's equal.  
Arjuna and Krishna are away;  
None but you can save the situation.  
Start right now and defeat the enemies."  
Listening to Yudhishthira's words,  
Abhimanyu saluted him, and replied:

"My Lord, can I face them alone?  
Too many in number are they, all indomitable stalwarts."

Yudhishtira was not diffident, said he:  
 "Bhima and sons of Draupadi  
 Brave Ghatotkacha, son of Bhima,  
 And warriors from Kekaya are here to go with you.  
 Worry not, Sumitra will be your charioteer."  
 At these words, Sumitra cautioned the boy  
 In a tactful way: "On the other side are,  
 Mind you, Drona, his brave son, and Karna,  
 Fearless Kripa and Bhoja  
 All great warriors, supreme commanders.  
 Against them, can a boy like you  
 Fight and win? It is risky, I warn you."  
 Abhimanyu, the son of Subhadra, on hearing  
 Such apprehensive comments,  
 Rose to the occasion and said:

"True it is, I am but a boy and weak,  
 Yet forget not whose son I am and his valour.  
 Think of my father's brother, Hanuman,  
 And my cousin the ever-ready Ghatotkacha,  
 Above all, my uncle Krishna  
 Among them, inconsequential I am, truly  
 But fight I will, till I die.  
 One thing more: should things ever come to that,  
 Remember! there are greater ones to avenge it.  
 But no need for such thoughts.  
 With their blessings I will conquer all.  
 No time to waste; start forthwith."

So saying he jumped into the chariot,  
 Well-equipped with bows and arrows.  
 The army of the Pandavas followed  
 The son of Arjuna, the Possessor of Gandiva,  
 They carried all available weapons;  
*Sulas, Parighas, Musalas, Chakras,*  
*Vels*, steel axes, spears, clubs,  
 Long-blade swords, shields,  
 Bows and arrows, quivers, sticks  
 Armours, helmets, stones and catapults.  
 They filled their chariots with such equipments.  
 A roaring ocean of chariots surging  
 With the speed of wind; endless they seemed.  
 Caparisoned elephants moved on

Like a set of Meru-mountains moving with weapons,  
 White horses sped on  
 Like foamy waves of oceans.  
 The infantry moved on and spread like a sea.  
 Some performed war-dances in front  
 To the accompaniment of drums and trumpets.  
 Shouting war cries they sped off.  
 Dust was raised darkening the skies.  
 The army of Kauravas was taken aback.

Seeing their plight and the bent for flight,  
 The mighty captain Drona ordered:  
 "None should turn away,  
 Fierce indeed is this great march of the enemy.  
 Attack them united as one man;  
 Bring formidable elephants to the front.  
 Let the most experienced soldiers give the lead."  
 Thus Drona, the son of Bharadwaja,  
 Took command of the action  
 And steadied the fighting on his front.  
 Arrows were showered in torrents  
 And the son of Arjuna marched forward  
 Showering arrows and killing the soldiers in rows.  
 In the place or those who fell  
 More daring fighters appeared.  
 Wounded or killed, the enemies lost their strength.  
 Finding the foes subdued,  
 The son of Arjuna made a final thrust  
 To shatter the *Padma Vyuha*, the lotus-like formation.  
 He broke the formation and penetrated into it.  
 Shattering the enemies in disorder.  
 Hands and legs flew off.  
 The sun was eclipsed by dust.  
 Acharya Drona's mind was baffled.  
 The celestial nymphs were overjoyed  
 The arrows from the great archer Abhimanyu  
 Enraged the enemy warriors;  
 Unable to thwart them, some sought to flee.  
 The impact was great, the chaos untold.  
 For a falling companion nothing could be done  
 But beating at one's own breast.  
 The panic made them blame each other,

While flinging missiles never missing the mark  
Blood-streams flowed turning the seas scarlet.  
Panic-stricken people took to their heels,  
Exhausted, they fell panting for breath.  
Women, frightened, beat their breasts.  
Happy indeed was one, the sage Narada,  
Who was chanting hymns of Lord Narayana.  
The warriors shouted, "Stop, stop and fight".  
Even the valiant turned and fell.  
The gods' chariots thronged along the sky.  
Runaway soldiers sought hiding places.  
Separated companions gave signal calls.  
Some were seen to blame their past deeds for the plight.  
Elephants fell and struggled in pain.  
The viewers stood in paralyzing fright.  
The devils gathered in legion and revelled.  
Kali rejoiced in the feast of blood.  
Fiery discs were thrown and heads were strewn;  
Warriors of superior prowess took the lead.  
Experts on the opposite side came to defend;  
Archers, confronted at close quarters,  
Used the bows to beat and bash.  
Bhima swung his club left and right,  
Falling mighty elephants and horses;  
Shouting war-cries he stormed the enemy rows.  
The onslaught led by the son of Arjuna  
Succeeded in shattering the battalion formation.  
Though unnerved at this, Duryodhana fought  
A valiant battle under the lead of Archarya Drona,  
And in the company of faithful ally-kings.  
Then the son of Arjuna advanced.  
It reminded Lakshmana's advance against the son of Ravana.  
To forestall the move, the brother of Shalya  
Turned his troops on him.  
But Abhimanyu acted quick and  
Sent him to the abode of Death.  
In helpless panic Duryodhana and Dushasana  
Watched the heroic deed;  
Shouted they, "Finish him here and now."  
Abhimanyu, undaunted, shouted back:  
"Meanest of rulers, stop where you stand,  
Shalya's brother needs company. I shall send you to him."

You deserve death for the nasty thing  
 You did to Panchali, stripping her in the royal court.  
 But your death must be at the hands of Bhima  
 Who has taken the vow to finish you off."  
 Saying so he showered arrows;  
 Dushshasana's charioteer was discreet  
 To turn back the chariot  
 Murmuring, "Not now, some time later."  
 Then it was Karna's turn to advance.  
 Abhimanyu faced him and fought fiercely.  
 He shot arrows, shouting aloud,  
 And broke into pieces Karna's bow, umbrella and flag;  
 He felled the horse; Karna had to flee in fear.  
 Shouted Abhimanyu, "Run not, stop to fight."  
 Enemy troops trembled like leaves of the banyan tree  
 And chose to withdraw.  
 Then Jayadratha came, confident was he;  
 The boon given by Lord Shiva gave him courage.  
 This was the one who long ago.  
 Tried to kidnap Panchali in the forest.  
 Bhima caught him on the spot;  
 Was about to chop off his head  
 But Yudhishtira intervened.  
 Punishment was reduced to humiliation.  
 His life was spared thus.  
 The insult led him to do penance.  
 And secure boons from Lord Shiva.  
 The boon would strengthen him to defeat  
 All but Arjuna;  
 This was the secret of his confidence now.  
 The troops of the Pandavas had to withdraw,  
 Abhimanyu too could not muster courage to face him.  
 The withdrawing troops were surrounded  
 By enemy troops, now revitalized,  
 They fortified their columns;  
 Rebuilt the formation in tact;  
 Terrible was the battle that ensued.  
 Abhimanyu, son of Arjuna, was surrounded  
 By all the mighty commanders;  
 Single-handed he fought against all,  
 And made every one of them run.  
 "Don't run away, behold!" said the son of Shalya



He advanced with his army, Abhimanyu killed them all.  
It looked they were lured by death.  
Then came Duryodhana, the son of Dhritarashtra,  
Abhimanyu made a grand onslaught;  
The sharpest arrows were shot in torrents.  
Duryodhana found it hard to withstand,  
And moved away in anguish.  
He shouted at others: "Why don't you finish him off?"  
His close allies paid heed;  
Tried to close in on Abhimanyu,  
Fighting from all directions;  
Arrows poured in from everywhere.  
Abhimanyu shot the Gandharva missile,  
Which warded off all the arrows shot at him.  
Wonder-struck was everyone at this feat.  
Unbelievable was the next thing they saw: .  
Wherever they looked Abhimanyu was there.  
Frightened, they withdrew.  
Provoked to the core, Abhimanyu blazed  
Like wild fire in a wood of dead trees.  
None in his way escaped.  
Seeing this terror advancing,  
Lakshana, son of Duryodhana,  
Tried to halt him.  
This enraged Abhimanyu who declared:

"Welcome, you can now leave straight for hell.  
In the very presence of your father."  
The son of Duryodhana replied with an arrow,  
But in vain; the counter-missile from Abhimanyu  
Hit the target straight. The warning came true;  
Lakshana was killed under the nose of his father.  
Duryodhana was shocked and stunned;  
He lost all vigour and hope,  
Abhimanyu was advancing like a roaring sea;  
Slicing all who crossed his path.  
Then all the six commanders together  
Unleashed attacks from all sides:  
Karna, Kripa, Kritavarma, Bhishma  
Drona and his son united they launched  
A massive offensive; the boy faced them alone.  
Soon he killed one of them, Bhishma;  
The other five were taken aback.

Crying "O! Shiva! Shiva!" they turned away.  
 Then came the turn for the duel  
 Between Abhimanyu and Karna.  
 At close range they fought fiercely;  
 Pierced by arrows the bloody bodies  
 Appeared like red bandhuka flowers.  
 The gods from heaven watched the brave fight;  
 Then six of Karna's captains came up;  
 The boy finished them all in an instant.  
 Then Magadha advanced only to be killed  
 By the son of Arjuna.  
 Witnessing the turn, all the troops took to their heels.  
 Five wicked younger brothers of Shakuni  
 Faltered in their run for life  
 Karna, Duryodhana, Drona, Bhoja and others  
 Looked at each other, panic-stricken.  
 Abhimanyu in his chariot  
 Was in a killing spree and killed the runaways.

Then Acharya Drona told Karna:  
 "Fighting the righteous way he can't be beaten.  
 First break the rules of war and then his bow.  
 If you break his bow from behind,  
 I can slay him, this son of Arjuna."

Karna was in doubt, he raised a dissenting voice:  
 "The virtuous will condemn us, no doubt.  
 This will be counted as the meanest deed.  
 Those who take to the science of archery  
 Should aim at a clean reputation  
 One may conquer all the world  
 Or go to heaven fallen in fight:  
 Either way ignoble methods are taboo.  
 No eloquence can justify them."

Hearing Karna's lecture on right and wrong,  
 The great guru pondered over  
 Professional rules and regulations  
 And found out a loophole.  
 All is fair to save one's life;  
 That is the law of the love for life,  
 And said, "This has to be done  
 To save our lives, do as I told you."

Karna then shot an arrow  
 From behind and broke the bow of Abhimanyu;  
 Acharya Drona killed the horses;  
 Kripa killed the charioteer.  
 Simultaneous was the attack from all sides.  
 Then the son of Arjuna took out his sword and shield,  
 Leaped into the air and brandished his sword.  
 The sword-strokes from above were least expected:  
 Difficult indeed it is to describe their plight.  
 All looked up in bewilderment.  
 The troops appeared all deranged.  
 Drona and Karna shot arrows  
 And broke the sword and shield of Abhimanyu.  
 Deprived of all weapons  
 He vaulted at them undaunted.  
 The son of Arjuna had in his mind's possession  
 A mantra, taught by Krishna his uncle.  
 While engaged in aggressive assault  
 His mind was chanting the mantra  
 And lo! the divine disc of fire appeared before him  
 It gyrated into his hands;  
 This unnerved the enemies who moved away.  
 But the guru had the knowledge  
 Of the exact missile to counter the disc.  
 Thus he broke it. The nephew of Krishna  
 Unshaken, now took up a club.  
 Weilding it he massacred elephants and horses,  
 Shattered chariots to pieces,  
 Beat king of Gandhara to death.  
 Everyone ran helter-skelter.

The next to advance was Bharata, son of Dushasana;  
 He showered arrows realizing well  
 The bravest of the brave in the world was his opponent,  
 The raining missiles Abhimanyu warded off,  
 Wielding the club dexterously.  
 Bharata's chariot was dashing at him  
 In a deft move he caught it and stopped.  
 So powerful was his stroke with the club,  
 The chariot was blasted to pieces and dust.  
 Now Bharata took up a club;  
 Their club-fight, I have no words to describe.

And futile it is to elaborate on it,  
As both the boys fell down dead.  
The spectators lamented "Alas, O Lord Shiva!  
Alas, alas, Oh Lord Vishnu!"

*vi*

### Krishna in the Chariot

The excerpt from Karna Parva given below gives a graphic word-picture of Krishna, the charioteer, on the battlefield; this is a fine example of the total identification of the poet with the object he describes.

Dear friend Karna, frantic enquiries you made  
Of the whereabouts of Arjuna;  
Lo! there he is, surrounded by  
An ocean of soldiers.  
He is coming on in the chariot  
With his friend Krishna,  
Who dwells in the minds of saints  
And the dainty bosoms of his milkmaid brides.  
Have a full view of Him,  
Coming in the midst of a wide-spread army.  
Look! I can see the peacock feathers  
Arrayed around the tied-up locks,  
He wears a crown  
Studded with diamonds and rubies.  
His tresses are thick and cloud-black,  
Curly ringlets adorn his forehead,  
Lovely with specks of dust on them.  
Soaked in sweat is the dot-mark on the forehead.  
Charming is the pair of eyebrows,  
Whose movements are the prime force  
Of creation, protection and destruction.  
Varied are the expressions in his eyes:  
Merciful towards dedicated followers,  
Wrathful against evil-minded wretches,  
Amorous for honey-tongued damsels,  
Marvelling at the turn of the war,  
Scornful of the timid waverers,  
Horrendous to the fighting enemies.  
How wonderful the flick and flash of those eyes!

See! the lotus-face and cheeks  
 Smooth as a mirror,  
 Which reflects the jewelled ear-studs.  
 See the nose glowing in silky sweat,  
 The lips blooming in a bewitching smile!  
 Garlands adorn his neck and chest,  
 Floral ones, intertwined  
 With lotus, basil and other tender leaves;  
 Chains of pearls with the *Kaustubha* jewel.  
 Shine on the chest emblazoned by kumkum paste.  
 He sits holding reins and whip in his hands.  
 Clad in yellow silk with a gold band over it,  
 The pair of feet lovely as red lotus.  
 Ah, I see him there in the chariot  
 As clearly as he is imprinted in my heart.

*vii*

### Mahaprasthanā

The Mahaprasthanā describes the final exit from the mortal world of the Pandavas, the five brothers and their spouse, Panchali; all, except the eldest, fall on the way; Dharmaja alone qualifies for the heavens because of his steadfast adherence to dharma.

Darling bird, speak to us in delight.  
 I am all ears for the rest of the story.  
 The supreme God, the sea-coloured one,  
 The consort of the daughter of the Milky Ocean,  
 Time incarnate, supremely Benevolent,  
 The cloud-coloured blemishless one,  
 Whose eyes, long as blue-lotus petals,  
 Ruler over the world had  
 Returned to Vaikunta at the call of time.  
 I am anxious to hear in detail.  
 The rest of the story of Yudhishtira,  
 Who immersed in thoughts of the roles he played  
 Took to the path of renunciation  
 Having performed the coronation of the young prince,  
 Certain I am that the act of listening  
 To the divine story will redeem me from my sins.  
 The bird readily agreed to narrate the story:

King Yudhishthira cut off all earthy ties  
 Hearing that Krishna, the charioteer of Arjuna,  
 Worshipped by all gods, entered the world of Vishnu,  
 With Balabhadra and all the members of the Yadava dynasty.  
 "No reason there is to live on earth any more;  
 The age of Kali has commenced for sure."

King Yudhishthira, the foremost of the devotees of Vishnu,  
 Concluded so, consulting his brothers and wife Panchali.  
 Having performed the coronation of Vishnuratha,  
 The only heir in the Lunar Dynasty.  
 They meditated on Krishna with the warmest sentiments  
 And performed the sacrifice named Prajapatya.  
 They had spiritual union with the sacrificial fire.  
 The inner light was kindled and supreme peace dawned.  
 Then they set out on the Mahaprasthanas,  
 The final journey of no return;  
 Yudhishthira's mind and soul  
 Focussed all powers of concentration on the Supreme One.  
 The infallible, the indivisible, the unembodied, the non-dual,  
 The Lord known to the senses of none,  
 Narayana, Easwara, who assumed human form,  
 The great one worshipped by Narada,  
 The Omnipotent, who assumed the cloud-coloured form,  
 Whose eyes are like lotus-petals,  
 The Creator of the lotus-born creator,  
 The exquisitely gorgeous one,  
 The Eternal, the Pure, the Immaculate, the Selfless,  
 The Eternal Unattached, the Supreme Spirit,  
 The One above virtues like *Satva*,  
 The One worshipped by sages like Sanaka,  
 The One whose very form is *Tattva*,  
 The Lord of all the worlds,  
 The immaculate, changeless One  
 The Desireless, the Inert, the One beyond all virtues,  
 The only one in whom diverse lives exist  
 The One who grants devotion and salvation,  
 The lover of devotees,  
 The embodiment of Energy, the Over-Soul  
 The Harbinger of all blessings  
 The Incarnation of meaning of all Vedas  
 The Omnipotent whose form is Vedas.  
 The Great One worshipped by all like Brahma,  
 The One revealed by the Vedas, the Endless, the One above all ills,

The Knower of the Vedas, the Best, the First, the One without *Beginning*,  
 The Embodiment of Delight, the Essence of Elixir, the Lord,  
 Janardana, the One who dwells in Vaikunta,  
 The lotus-eyed one, the Consort of Lakshmi,  
 The moon-faced one, the one born in the Lunar Dynasty,  
 The One worshipped by Shiva, Lord Mukunda,  
 The Bliss-giver, the Vanquisher of Demon Kaitabha, Lord Govinda,  
 Son of Nanda, Son of Devaki, the One born in the Yadava clan,  
 Son of Vasudeva, the God of gods, the Killer of Demon Mura,  
 Lord Naryana: with his mind fixed on Him  
 The brave Yudhishtira stepped out.  
 His brothers and wife Panchali  
 Followed him in the proper order with reverence.  
 They walked towards the north.  
 Then in front of them  
 Appeared the god of fire, all on a sudden;  
 Said he to Arjuna in all kindness:  
 "O great warrior, son of Pandu, Arjuna:  
 That bow Gandeeva is in your hand;  
 Leave it with Varuna, the god of the ocean,  
 And then walk on without sorrow."  
 Duly they worshipped the god of fire  
 And did as told.  
 Arjuna walked on, leaving  
 The wonderful Gandeeva with the god of the ocean.

The son of Dharmaraja<sup>1</sup> had to be put to the test.  
 With this in mind came Dharmaraja  
 In the form of a dog looking famished and pitiable  
 With an expression of meekness and servitude.  
 The dog followed their footsteps.  
 So they walked on and on.  
 No one knew how Panchali fell on the ground.  
 Bhima, startled, asked Yudhishtira:  
 "O My Lord! kindly tell us why she fell."  
 The king did not turn but replied:  
 "Wife to all the five, her love was not equal:  
 She loved Arjuna more, could not get over this partiality;  
 That was the reason for her fall."

1. The god of death.

Then Sahadeva fell and Yudhishtira  
Revealed the reason for that as well.  
"He had the supreme pride that  
None on earth would beat him  
In the knowledge of the Shastras."

They walked on slowly;  
It was the turn of Nakula to fall.  
When asked by Bhima, Yudhishtira said:  
"He cherished the thought  
That he was the most handsome on earth."

And then Arjuna, the son of Indra, fell.  
Bhima told this to his brother;  
But Yudhishtira, did not turn around.  
Wonderful indeed was his courage.  
Bhima was anxious to know the reason.  
The great man then revealed the truth:  
"Arjuna, the son of Indra too was conceited;  
No one to equal him in archery, he thought,  
This was the reason for his fall,  
And the next is your turn;  
For you too have a similar mania.  
The strongest of men am I, you think;  
That will cause your fall, son of the wind-god.  
Don't be sad; in vain is all sorrow.  
Born on the earth, one has to die."

Saying so the king walked on towards the north.  
When Bhima too fell, he did not look back,  
But continued to walk  
The dog alone now followed him.  
"None to save me but you",  
The animal seemed to tell him with its eyes.  
The king was all mercy for it.

Then it happened:  
A golden chariot descended from the heavens.  
There was a messenger of Indra in it  
Who conveyed to him the invitation to heaven.  
It is difficult to narrate the strange things  
That happened next.  
But I shall narrate it later.  
Saying so, the bird stopped.



## III

## The Hymn of the Lord's Names

*Harinamakirtanam* (Harināmakīrtanam) is a devotional and philosophical hymn written most probably in the Sixteenth century. Till a generation ago it was the custom in many Hindu households to light an oil lamp before sunrise and sing this hymn. Even now there is hardly a devout Hindu who does not know at least a few verses of this poem by heart. The traditional belief is that "Harinamakirtanam" was written by Thunchathu Ezhuthacchan. Except the first thirteen and the last two verses, the other verses have each its first letter in the order of the Malayalam alphabet. The poem is a beautiful blend of advaitic philosophy and devotion to a personal god. The god worshipped is Mahavishnu, especially in his incarnations as Rama and Krishna. The poem shows extraordinary skill in condensing and concretising philosophic thought and infusing it with a variety of feeling—fear of worldly life, fear of what lies beyond the grave, bewilderment at the inscrutable ways of divine justice, distrust of the ego, and above all fervent devotion, trust and hope. Most of the verses are dramatic in style, noble and serious in tone and unobtrusively but enchantingly musical. When a great mind deals with a great subject, power and beauty are created. This poem combines the qualities of energy, depth and beauty.

Om, the One Reality Ultimate  
 into three parts divided itself  
 at that instant was the Supreme Ego born,  
 changeless was Om, witness to this change.  
 Great Preceptor who helped me realize this,  
 Hari Narayana, I bow unto you.

When I saw the One that was you  
 manifest as two,  
 unutterable was the anguish in my heart  
 may your infinite grace alight on me,  
 may what you were of old come back again to me!  
 O Narayana, I bow unto you.

Supreme mind, blissful and divine,  
 Hari, lord beloved of the cowherd girls,  
 never let the feeling "I" be in my heart,  
 or if I feel it, let all things be felt as "I"  
 O Narayana, I bow unto you.

The eye takes in  
 what the sun and fire and other lights show  
 the eye's eye is the mind

and the mind's eye the Inner Truth  
when I know for certain I am the Truth  
what infinite joy shall be mine!

O Narayana, I bow unto you.

With Hari's names I make my song,  
May my teacher bless my song!  
May gods and brahmins bless it too!  
A human being born on the earth,  
may I be blessed to chant His names  
all my life and in my last breath too!

O Narayana, I bow unto you.

From Nature rooted in divine glory  
to the distant end of life and death  
stretches the supreme Maya's path;  
life after life may lapse  
but karma never comes to a pause.

O Narayana, I bow unto you.

For a while in the mother's womb;  
then this birth, thereafter death:  
a bubble is this human life;  
only when births cease does salvation come.  
I pray you, let devotion grow in my heart;  
day after day I shall fall at your feet.

O Narayana, I bow unto you.

O Achyuta, the imperishable one,  
make my heart your playground;  
sport in my heart in many ways,  
as Lord of Lakshmi the lotus-born,  
as the ancient primordial male,  
as the loving lord of all devotees  
as the one with neither beginning nor end.

O Narayana, I bow unto you.

Some who desire to see  
the colours of the green bird, coral and milk  
ascend the six mystic centres  
and reach the most exalted state  
where in triune aspects He resides

embodied as *satva*, *rajas*, *tamas*  
to create, preserve and dissolve  
Hari Narayana, I bow unto you.

He whose quest of the Truth  
shining in all created things,  
sits in humble faith at a teacher's feet;  
he gets the counsel that liberates his soul,  
the chain of birth and death then snaps for him.  
O Narayana, I bow unto you.

To know my sins,  
Yama, god of death and judge of right and wrong,  
will read the whole record  
Chitragupta has made of me;  
when all the sins he sees,  
stored up to my account  
Hari, I cry to you, my lotus-eyed Lord.  
O Narayana, I bow unto you.

Clusters of stars and the moon  
fade when the sun shines forth;  
birds fly to Garuda, their king,  
"Protect us, your slaves", they pray  
O Narayana, I bow unto you.

He who has come to know  
his soul as the supreme soul  
knows to be fleeting visions,  
his body and life, his spouse and wealth;  
he is like one who wakes up  
from a sleep that was full of dreams.  
! Hari Narayana, I bow unto you.

I am about to sing  
the praises of Hari, my lord;  
I pray may Neelakanta, my guru,  
in loving kindness shine in my heart!  
May he bless me to sing a song  
with the fifty-one letters one by one!  
Hari Narayana, I bow unto you.

In the first letter  
 was this universe born;  
 into it, it reverts in the end;  
 with it let my hymn begin  
 and be followed by each of the rest.

O Narayana, I bow unto you.

May in my mind be present  
 the visible world, the gods like Indra.  
 the sun, the moon, the god of fire,  
 Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva  
 and O all-pervasive Cosmic Being,  
 above all Om, your primal name!

O Narayana, I bow unto you.

To drive off the delusion  
 that has come upon the soul,  
 what counsel, but your names,  
 all your holy names,  
 like Rama, Krishna, Govinda?

O Narayana, I bow unto you.

Pride and rivalry and all the sins  
 may lie thick in the human heart,  
 but to one who chants your holy names,  
 easy is the upward path.

O Narayana, I bow unto you.

One needs no ceremonial site,  
 no materials for sacred rites,  
 nor water fetched from holy springs,  
 not even one's spouse to help;  
 one's tongue alone one needs  
 to chant your holy names  
 Narayana, Achyuta, Hari:

Hari Narayana, I bow unto you.

Be it a woman in her period,  
 or a beggar or a depraved man,  
 or a man who burns the dead  
 or a brahmin who performs the rites  
 of sacrifice to the god of fire:  
 everyone can chant His names,  
 to none is the right denied;

Hari Narayana, I bow unto you.

A great fool, some may call me,  
 a sinner, others deem me.  
 "what do I know" is all I say.  
 I go on chanting your names;  
     Hari Narayana, I bow unto you.

Adepts in occult rites  
 use mystic signs to choose a mantra  
 but to choose a name of Hari's  
 no one needs such secret rites;  
 million on million are your names  
 and none of them is barred to us;  
     Hari Narayana, I bow unto you.

O Lord, who has forms like Shiva,  
 with folded hands I fall at your feet.  
 Why does it take so long a time  
 for devotion deep to dawn within me?  
     Hari Narayana, I bow unto you.

Longing to follow the single-minded sages,  
 my mind too pursues the spirit's lonely path,  
 it is like a crow that tries to follow  
 the swans in their majestic flight;  
     Hari Narayana, I bow unto you.

Five times five plus five and five times six  
 plus eight plus eight and eight times three and seven,  
 Yet another five plus two and one:  
 O Lord who resides in these mystic numbers!  
     O Narayana, I bow unto you.

The oneness of all the scriptures sing;  
 too weak is my mind to grasp it.  
 all I need is a drop of your mercy;  
 grant it now itself I pray;  
     Hari Narayana, I bow unto you.

The canker in the fruit of the fig  
 gloats, "there's no joy greater than this",  
 let not your ravishing Maya  
 trap me in the beguiling thought  
 "I am this body of mine";  
     O Narayana, I bow unto you.

Fear fills my heart to think  
 Brahma himself had to swim  
 in delusions' boundless sea.  
 I cling to your feet, O Lord,  
 free me of fear, I pray.  
 O Narayana, I bow unto you.

With a baton and a coil of rope  
 Death's henchmen had Ajamila bound;  
 when lo! four divine forms came,  
 stopped them, and set him free.  
 I salute those divine four;  
 Hari Narayana, I bow unto you.

Alas! when a Pandya king worshipped you,  
 why did you make Agastya curse him,  
 and a crocodile fasten its teeth on him?  
 I cannot bear to think of it, my Lord;  
 Hari Narayana, I bow unto you.

But behold, to the king Khatvanga  
 you granted salvation in a trice;  
 what is your justice, Oh Lord?  
 Why these inexplicable games?  
 O Narayana, I bow unto you.

When arrogant Jarasandha challenged you,  
 you had no strength to face him, you said;  
 but enough of strength you showed  
 to boil the mighty ocean with your fiery shafts.  
 O Narayana, I bow unto you.

When parted from your wife  
 what a mournful plaint you made  
 that the moon's cool rays were sweltering heat!  
 Later in Vrindavan's groves  
 you made the doe-eyed damsels  
 wander about in anguish, seeking you;  
 O Narayana, I bow unto you.

Cutting off a demoness's nose  
 you made her speech deformed;

aren't you the same person  
as touched a hunch-back serving-maid  
and made her an enchanting beauty?

Hari Narayana, I bow unto you.

Taking the whip, tightening the reins,  
you stood a charioteer to Arjun, Indra's son,  
in the field of battle;  
but hiding behind a tree,  
with a single shaft you slew  
Bali, another son of Indra;

O Narayana, I bow unto you.

Like a glowing coal with ashes overspread  
is your glory glimmering in the world;  
incomprehensible it is to the human mind.  
What do even the sages praise  
but the little that they glimpse each day?

O Narayana, I bow unto you.

In the heart of all created things  
continuous and perfect is your presence;  
everything that is born is strung on you,  
like varied gems on a string;

O Narayana, I bow unto you.

There is an underlying sound,  
all-pervasive, full, unchanging;  
Bliss Supreme, you are that sound,  
filling the sages' minds;  
and the hymns they sing as well,  
and the ocean of milk and the sky above;

O Narayana, I bow unto you.

When consciousness split into two  
and grew as God and me,  
Out of this split, deep delusion rose,  
dualities of knowledge in endless forms.

Free me, O Lord, I pray to you  
Of these guiles your Maya makes;

O Narayana, I bow unto you.

Half your body bears the axe and the stag,  
the other half the conch and the disc.  
Whoever meditates on Om, your form,  
is freed from the mazes of Maya's ways.

O Narayana, I bow unto you.

As the tunes and notes of music  
unite at a basic pitch,  
so do all things unite in Om;  
subtle it is, like space all-pervasive;

O Narayana, I bow unto you.

Free me of all troubles, I pray,  
eager I am to cast off the eight-fold sin,  
to master a yogic posture,  
to keep the *sushumna* still,  
and to transcend the spiritual centres six;

Hari Narayana, I bow unto you.

As the spirit winds its upward path  
through the mystic centres of the spine,  
it hears divine music played on unseen lyres and drums:  
So say the sages, and my heart like a chained elephant  
tugs at its bonds seeing the fodder beyond its reach;

Hari Narayana, I bow unto you.

In the course of my spiritual quest  
I may or may not attain perfect bliss;  
my karma may or may not reach its end:  
Whatever it be, bless me, Lord, I pray  
not to lose the awareness I have gained of you;

O Narayana, I bow unto you.

In all things the ultimate Truth exists;  
it abides in sounds, and sounds to salvation lead:  
in the scriptures you have said this yourself;

Hari Narayana, I bow unto you.

Arrogant and impatient are some;  
they think there is none so great as they;  
all the time they quarrel and fight with others,  
and you kill them with their own overweening pride;

O Narayana, I bow unto you.



From the ego's mighty tree  
 many are the branches that sprout  
 and endless the fruits that are borne;  
 let them not smother my life, I pray;  
 safety from them lies in devotion to you;  
 Hari Narayana, I bow unto you.

"Blessed I am; most revered I am;  
 many are the virtuous deeds I've done":  
 Not one, but countless are the elephants that come  
 crowding into the ego's dense, dark woods;  
 O Narayana, I bow unto you.

The fire of knowledge burns the ego's woods,  
 and on the ashes falls your mercy's abundant rain;  
 it pours down from the mystic lotus where you dwell;  
 Abode of Mercy, may this nourishing rain  
 help the growth of *bhakti* sprouting in my heart!  
 O Narayana, I bow unto you.

May the tongue that wastes the daylight hours  
 in idle talk on sundry things  
 be used to chant your holy names!  
 I hear that in this age of Kali,  
 easy is the upward path  
 to those who chant your names, O Lord;  
 Hari Narayana, I bow unto you.

If I cannot attain my spirit's goal,  
 let not my body live for long;  
 unclean it is, and a burden too;  
 let not time be lost any more  
 for light infinite to dawn in my heart;  
 O Narayana, I bow unto you.

When bound to one's home and king  
 to one's wife and sons and wealth,  
 what use is knowledge of the Lord?  
 It is only a mirror held to a blind man;  
 Save me from such a fate, I pray:  
 O Narayana, I bow unto you.

Like a snake in resolute pursuit  
 of a poor hopping frog,  
 Death follows me to gulp me down,  
 his jaws yawning like a cave;  
 Hari Narayana, I bow unto you.

Ever since on this earth I was born,  
 whatever I have done  
 with body, mind or word,  
 and whatever may be done  
 in the days that are yet to come,  
 may they all be pleasing to your heart!  
 O Narayana, I bow unto you.

Whatever I see is Narayana's form,  
 whatever I hear is Narayana's hymns,  
 whatever I do is Narayana's worship,  
 whatever it is Narayana Himself;  
 Hari Narayana, I bow unto you.

Hari, you bear a disc in your hand;  
 it is brilliant like a million suns;  
 the bed on which you repose always  
 is divine Ananta, king of the serpent world;  
 a garland of wild blossoms adorns your chest,  
 sparkling with Kaustubha, the celestial gem:  
 may this form of yours stay in my heart for ever!  
 Hari Narayana, I bow unto you.

To create numberless forms,  
 to preserve them, and destroy them,  
 two mysterious powers arose from Him.  
 "Projection" and "Veiling" they are called;  
 O Narayana, I bow unto you.

My countenance is fire;  
 my raiments are dawn and dusk;  
 my abdomen is the sea; my abode  
 all the fourteen worlds;  
 my eyes are day and night:  
 Lord, bless me to realize this truth;  
 O Narayana, I bow unto you.

With what little strength I have  
 I worship you, my God;  
 when will I get the rooted faith?  
 I am not this body I have;  
 when will your mercy grant me leave  
 to cling to your feet in love?  
     Hari Narayana, I bow unto you.

My heart is your own abode;  
 don't let my six foes frolic there;  
 be seated in my heart once a day at least,  
 Lord, revered of all the world!  
     Hari Narayana, I bow unto you.

I tell you true, my Lord.  
 my servants, my wife, my wealth,  
 my children and my friends:  
 all that is mine I offer unto you,  
 and I too fall at your divine feet;  
     Hari Narayana, I bow unto you.

Neither Shiva, nor Brahma,  
 nor Indra, king of the gods  
 knows how glorious and great is your Maya.  
 Lord, whose presence in my heart  
 has not changed from the time of my birth,  
 manifest yourself to me, I pray;  
     O Narayana, I bow unto you.

Oft in speech, the sound *la*  
 turns into *la*;  
 wisely seen, your change is such  
 from soul divine to human soul.  
 Lord, resplendent in my heart you are,  
 like a golden lamp with wicks all lit;  
     O Narayana, I bow unto you.

It is widely said  
 your seven-syllabled mantra  
 rose from the syllable ineffable;  
 no one ever knows its meaning,  
 but, reveal it to me, I pray;  
     O Narayana, I bow unto you.

May my merciful guru, I pray,  
correct the errors in my hymn!  
May this hymn be like a ship  
saving from the middle of misery's sea  
the souls in billowing waters tossed about!  
O Narayana, I bow unto you.

If people sing this hymn to Him,  
their hearts untouched with sin,  
blessed shall be both they and I,  
and this I say to all the world:  
Never into the sea of birth and death  
shall fall a man who hears this song  
or one who learns even a line of it;  
O Narayana, I bow unto you.

From *Harinamakirtanam*, 16th century

Tr. by B. Hrdaya Kumari

IV

Twenty-four Cantos

*Irupattinaluvritam* (*Irupattināluvṛttam*) is a dramatic narrative on the story of Rama, believed to be the work of Thunchathu Ezhuthacchan. It consists of twenty-four cantos. Each canto is in a separate metre. Hence the title of the work literally means "twenty-four metres". Each stanza ends with a refrain which provides a frame for the narrative structure and constitutes the poet's salutation to God, and is not part of the speech of any character. The poem cannot claim much literary beauty, but it shows a deft conventionality, and is eloquent and energetic. The language of the work gives evidence that the poem was composed in the 15th or early 16th century. This "Ramayana" is one of the popular compositions on the Rama-theme in Malayalam.

i

Rama's Complaint

"Rama's Complaint" is from Canto VIII and depicts Rama's lament on his separation from Sita.

Dasharatha's son, the guardian of his devotees,  
and a friend to all mankind, was parted from his wife;  
his grief blazed high; his passionate love was afire,  
which smelted his heart and scorched it too.  
O Shiva, the Supreme Lord, O Shambhu!

Again and again he cried out for Sita;  
 unable to embrace her breasts,  
 his body was drenched in sweat.  
 Deep were his sighs and incessant his tears.  
 O Shiva, the Supreme Lord, O Shambhu!

"Sita, my beloved, where have you gone?  
 Come back, O paragon of virtues, come back to me.  
 Since I cannot see your beauteous face,  
 great is my grief, my tremulous-eyed one.  
 O Shiva, the Supreme Lord, O Shambhu!

Is your desire so great for the golden deer?  
 I do have the skill to fulfil that desire;  
 I can get you the golden deer of the moon.  
 O lotus-faced one, don't be displeased any more.  
 O Shiva, the Supreme Lord, O Shambhu!

Herds of young does, come to me, I pray;  
 tell me the truth: where is Sita gone,  
 the crest-jewel of doe-eyed damsels?  
 where is the lotus-faced one hiding, grieved at heart?  
 O Shiva, the Supreme Lord, O Shambhu!

O Chakravaka bird, wan are your looks,  
 and incessant your plaints; are you hapless like me?  
 In these forests I am roaming about,  
 anxious to find my beloved.  
 O Shiva, the Supreme Lord, O Shambhu!

Tell me, Tulsi, tell me charming jasmine,  
 Isn't she with you, she who excels you in grace?  
 Is the tender creeper I see, her body?  
 And are the tendrils, her eyebrows moving?  
 O Shiva, the Supreme Lord, O Shambhu!

Mother of all things, inert and living,  
 Goddess Earth, I pray you, tell me:  
 where is your noble daughter, the loveliest of women,  
 the source of all my joy, my spouse of spotless fame?  
 O Shiva, the Supreme Lord, O Shambhu!

Humming bees, listen, where is the helpless girl?  
 Lovely lotus, tell me, where is the lotus-faced one?  
 Singing birds, where is she whose voice is sweet like yours?  
 Immense is the grief surging in my heart.

O Shiva, the Supreme Lord, O Shambhu!

"My beloved is drowned in the deep waters.  
 See the lotus-hands; save her, O brother!"  
 "Lord of the Raghus, it isn't her lotus-hands;  
 it's the lotus of the water that you see."

O Shiva, the Supreme Lord, O Shambhu!

"I hear the anklets of the sweet-voiced lady  
 jingle among the thick growth of the lotus."  
 "It's not the sound of the anklets of her feet.  
 but the cries of the swans that swim on the lake."

O Shiva, the Supreme Lord, O Shambhu!

"I see her beautiful lotus-face in the sky."  
 "it's only the full-moon that you see."  
 "I can hear Sita's voice in the woods."  
 "It's only the song of the cuckoos you hear."

O Shiva, the Supreme Lord, O Shambhu!

He rushed to embrace a creeper heavy with buds,  
 mistaking them for the breasts of his beloved.  
 Lakshmana intervened and said to his brother,  
 the lotus-eyed one: "Do not do this, do not."

O Shiva, the Supreme Lord, O Shambhu!

"Come here brother, this tree gives us shade."  
 "But there is no sun; these are the rays of the moon."  
 "Will the cool rays of the moon burn my body."  
 "It's only the fire of your anguished love."

O Shiva, the Supreme Lord, O Shambhu!

"Come to me, O merciful sleep,  
 who dispels the anguish of separation  
 and grants well-being to all mankind;  
 take pity on me; I'm sleepless for long."

O Shiva, the Supreme Lord, O Shambhu!

Rama in the misery of parting  
 called out to Sita time and again.  
 When the daughter of Janaka responded not,  
 bitter was the anger that filled his heart.  
 O Shiva, the Supreme Lord, O Shambhu!

Furious he was with Ravana, his foe.  
 He strung his bow and struck the taut string,  
 causing the sound to reverberate again and yet again,  
 filling with fear his enemies in the three worlds.  
 O Shiva, the Supreme Lord, O Shambhu!

Seeing the crowded lotus blossoms,  
 he thought of her eyes and hurried his steps;  
 at the touch of the breeze from the Malaya hills,  
 he faltered and cried, "Alas, I die."  
 O Shiva, the Supreme Lord, O Shambhu!

He wandered in the woods and searched for her  
 in every direction; he forgot his brother;  
 at times he wept, at times he complained.  
 How thin he looked, how woe-begone he was!  
 O Shiva, the Supreme Lord, O Shambhu!

## *ii*

### Ravana and Sita

"Ravana and Sita" is from Canto X and describes the meeting between Sita and her abductor Ravana in Lanka.

"Sweetest of sweet-voiced damsels, most bewitching beauty,  
 goddess, daughter of Videha's lord, lotus-eyed lady,  
 I shall give you bangles and anklets, gems and necklaces;  
 Will you listen to me and cure me of love's pangs?  
 My salutations to Lord Narayana!

Push aside your tressess, let me see your moon-like face;  
 let me see your charming smile, O tremulous-eyed one.  
 Press me to your bosom, darling, and in the game of love.  
 allow me to taste the honey of your lips.  
 My salutations to Lord Narayana!

Lovely lady, bestow a glance of your long eyes on me.  
It is no frivolous joke I am making;  
intense is the craving that afflicts my heart  
to get a glimpse of your face so beautiful and bright.  
My salutations to Lord Narayana!

Young lady, moon-light to the eyes of men,  
hug me, love-stricken, and taste of my love;  
we shall dwell in this city of mine;  
to you shall be given all glory and greatness.  
My salutations to Lord Narayana!

Tremulous-eyed Sita, be my beloved;  
I shall cast off my wife Mandodari.  
Great is the desire that rises in my heart  
to sip at once the honey of your luscious lips.  
My salutations to Lord Narayana!

Most beautiful of the human race, listen:  
I will take you to my heart, embrace you close,  
and feed on all I had fancied of the sweets of love;  
you too take me to your heart and hold me close.  
My salutations to Lord Narayana!

Lady, many a lovely maiden had longed  
and toiled and moiled to win my love;  
not the slender-limbed women of the earth alone,  
but the radiant nymphs of heaven too.  
My salutations to Lord Narayana!

Come, my love, to the bed in the bridal room;  
I shall give you, my charming friend, jewels to wear;  
rings for your fingers, bracelets and anklets,  
necklaces and gold chains; gorgeous with diamond.  
My salutations to Lord Narayana!

Tell me what delicacies you like to taste  
and what dishes are distasteful to you.  
Do you know, Sita, you are the sweet I fancy,  
sugar and all the sugary things I crave for?  
My salutations to Lord Narayana!



I shall give you vials of musk and sweet-scented balms  
and saffron-paste to adorn your breasts;  
if in gracious willingness you yield to me,  
I shall be relieved of the wrong I have done.  
My salutations to Lord Narayana!

When a man stands by a woman's side  
and tell her how he suffers for love for her,  
I have no doubt, it is proper for her  
to yield to his prayers, out of pity for him.  
My salutations to Lord Narayana!

Rama in misery must be roaming the woods;  
his crown he lost first, and then he lost you;  
press me to your bosom; let us play love's game;  
when tired you can sleep on my chest, my love.  
My salutations to Lord Narayana!

Didn't the goddess of learning take her father to spouse?  
Didn't love-sick Ahalya take the king of the gods?  
Didn't Brihaspati's wife take the Moon as her lover?  
Be pleased, my darling, to hug me with joy.  
My salutations to Lord Narayana!

Great is the difference between me and Rama;  
twenty hands have I to embrace you,  
and ten faces to kiss your charming face;  
he has just one face and a pair of hands.  
My salutations to Lord Narayana!

If in joyous willingness you love me,  
the world entire, lovely lady, shall yield to you.  
What greater glory can a woman desire?  
Tell me if you do not long for such an honour?  
My salutations to Lord Narayana"

When the love-sick, ingratiating Ravana  
spoke thus, the noblest of women said;  
"Ravana, such deeds bode ill for you;  
extinct will be your race for what you do.  
My salutations to Lord Narayana!

Before Rama comes and vanquishes you in battle,  
and walks away with me, O traitor, in triumph,  
take me to the forest, where my dearest lord is;  
fall at his feet and restore me to him.  
My salutations to Lord Narayana!

As you go on seducing other men's wives  
and dream of the joys of corrupt love,  
Death, the demoness, is waiting by your side  
and deadly arrows are aimed at your head.

My salutations to Lord Narayana!

Consumed by grief am I at separation from my lord  
and sorely afflicted by the words you speak,  
but still I shall sustain my life in the hope  
that the Lord of the Raghus will soon be with me.

My salutations to Lord Narayana!

Whether you wax eloquent cajoling me  
or whether you drag me about by the hair,  
be certain of this, most heinous of demons,  
never shall I yield to you, whatever you do."

My salutations to Lord Narayana!

From *Irupattinaluvritam*, 16th century

Tr. by B. Hrdaya Kumari

## Two Poems

### POONTHANAM

POONTHANAM NAMBUJIRI (Pūntānam Nampūtiri, 16th century) was a contemporary of Melputhur Narayana Bhattathiri and Thunchathu Ezhuthacchan. He may be said to represent the school of simple and direct devotion. His relationship to Lord Krishna is almost personal and not based on erudite and abstruse scholarship or high rhetoric. Although not inferior to any one in his deep understanding of Vaishnavite philosophy and Upanishadic vision, he expressed his feelings and thought in very simple Malayalam, often of a colloquial quality and brings home to the average man an intimate and intense experience of *bhakti*. His works include *Jnanappana* (The Song of Wisdom), *Santanagopalam* (The Story of Krishna and the Brahmin's Children) and a very large number of hymns which are popular throughout Kerala.

*i*

## The Song of Wisdom

*Jnanappana* (jñānappāṇa) is one of the most profound expressions of divine wisdom and intense spirituality. It contains speculations about the condition of man in the world along with a critique of the moral decline in the society of the poet's time.

Let every one know that  
This is the holy land of India

And that of all the four ages  
Kaliyuga is the best to attain salvation.

Know that there is no other means  
Than to chant the names of the Lord:

"O Krishna! O Mukunda!  
O Rama! O Govinda!"

This seems to be the thought weighing with  
The people destined to dwell

On islands six, continents eight  
And thirteen worlds other than this,

As well as of the other three ages.  
Since salvation is not within their reach

They offer salutations to India  
During the age of Kali, and say:

"O God, we were not fortunate enough  
To be born there at least as a blade of grass.

Salutations to Kali  
And the people of India!"

So the others praise this land;  
But why should we talk of that?

Isn't this the age of Kali?  
And isn't this the land of India?

Are we not men? So we should think!  
Are the names of the Lord in short supply?

Are the people now less afraid of hell?  
Are we all born without tongues?

Or do we think we are immortal?  
Unwittingly we burn away our lives.

How many forms of life we had assumed  
Ere we took this human form!

How many lives in mire we lived!  
How many lives in water we spent!

How many lives deep in the mud!  
How many lives static like trees!

How many lives in death-in-life!  
How many times as beasts and cattle!

Ere we assumed this human form,  
What ordeals haven't we gone through!

To be cast into a mother's womb;  
To spend ten long months there;

Ten years or more as petted lads;  
Then we swell with puffed-up pride.

Not knowing what we ourselves are,  
And how many years lie ahead.

No one can truly count.  
Fragile like a watery bubble,

The body keeps the semblance of a breath.  
That too peters out unawares!

And yet we would seldom chant  
The Lord's name, while breath does last.

Fighting for power and pelf  
Some lead shameless lives.

Obsessed with pride and rancour  
Some act most senselessly.

In the houses of flirting damsels  
Some practise pranks like apes.

Donning the garbs of palace courtiers.  
Some indulge in vainglory.

Some struggle hard as temple priests  
From morn to eve to feed their kin.

Father, mother and spouse;  
Some offer not a morsel to them.

Some do not see even in dreams  
Their legally-wedded wives.

Some turn into wild foes  
When advice is offered by friends.

Some taunt with insults  
Even those that merit respect.

And lo! some braggarts shout;  
Their words alone hold this world.

Puffed up with their Brahminhood,  
Some hold Lord Brahma Himself inferior,

Out of the greed for wealth,  
Some perform rituals like fire sacrifice,

Some trade in precious gems and gold  
Beyond any count.

Some trade in elephants and horses.  
Of superior breed,

And build ships, too; O Lord,  
How much money they make!

Strange! To hoard up wealth  
Some can live in filth.

No matter how much they hoard,  
Never are they content at heart.

When a man has ten in hand,  
"Hit a hundred", chimes the mind.

When a hundred is earned with strife,  
A thousand is the dream of life.

When a thousand comes with sweat  
 "Ten thousand will make me rest"

Thus does greed twine and climb  
 Higher and higher day by day.

If good people go and beg,  
 The evil ones won't spare a bit.

Alas, when they die,  
 They can't take a piece of cloth!

With no regard for repentance,  
 They betray their own faith.

Out of the greed for wealth,  
 Some abandon truth altogether.

Truth is Brahma and that alone  
 Is truth: the virtuous believe so.

Not knowing what should be known,  
 Some do pretend to be scholars.

Even as the donkey carries saffron,  
 Not knowing the scent of saffron.

When one thinks of it, O Krishna,  
 Everyone is carried away by desire.

As the life-line recedes,  
 Ambition keeps mounting high.

Onam<sup>1</sup> has come, Vishu is over;  
 And Athira is yet to come.

Under the star of Aswati  
 Comes my birthday in the month of May.

In November is the day of the dead:  
 Yet feasts I can hardly host.

1. Onam, Vishnu and Athira are popular festival seasons in Kerala.

To have a son and to see him wed  
And see him have a son: it is all I want.

The land just adjacent to my house  
I should not let any one else acquire.

A man goes on planning and brooding thus;  
But alas! he has to succumb to death.

Why do I dwell on all this now?  
Let everyone think as much as he can.

Think about the great Karma,  
About the many lives we have crossed.

About the Kaliyuga that has descended.  
And the vastness of the land of India,

Our birth there, the ways in which  
Our years have been wasted,

The mutability of human life,  
The state of being in health,

The salvation that is sure to come,  
With the chanting of the Lord's names,

The fear of the hell to come:  
All that we have to think today:

Why waste your time here;  
Set off for Vaikunta, the abode of Vishnu.

We are not born together;  
Nor do we die together.

And when we meet thus in the interim,  
Why should we compete in vain!

And why crave for wealth  
When the greatest wealth of salvation is there!

When the mid-day sun is aglow,  
Why care for the glow-fly!

When darling Krishna dances in the mind  
Do we need other children as sons?

From *Jnanappana*, 16th century

Tr. by R. Viswanathan

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### The Lord of the Holy Vaikom Shrine

This hymn by Poonthanam is addressed to Lord Shiva, the presiding deity of the famous temple at Vaikom. It is one of the most popular of the many devotional songs composed by him.

A man I am born on this earth  
Amidst the tides of the sea of hell.  
Cast me ashore and save me from it,  
O Lord Shiva of the holy shrine of Vaikom!

O the terror at the time of death!  
Think of it, and the mind pales!  
Enter my mind and freely shine forth,  
O Lord Shiva of the holy shrine of Vaikom!

The ways of Maya are wayward,  
And beyond words, O Shiva!  
Lift that veil, Lord and bless me,  
O Lord Shiva, of the holy shrine of Vaikom!

Lost in a wild jungle, O Lord,  
I grope to find my way;  
Lead me along the righteous path,  
O Lord Shiva of the holy shrine of Vaikom!

The easy path when all reckoned:  
Six steps are on the way to it,  
When you pass all the six and reach there,  
You can see the feet of the Lord.  
O Shiva, O Lord Shambhu  
O Shambhu, O Lord Shiva!

From *Naranayingane*, 16th century

Tr. by R. Viswanathan



## Three Folk Songs

ANONYMOUS

*i*

### When Did the Sky and the Earth Arise?

The following is a folksong supposed to be sung by peasants when they attend to farming. The refrain re-enforcing the formulaic rhythm is suggestive of dance-like movement, while the poem itself is partly nonsensical.

*Tiyo tinunto tinuntinunto - titai*  
*Teyyittinunto tinuntinunto*

When I was the ruler of Champaka country,  
 I asked one question in all earnestness:

When did the sky and the earth arise? - *Titai*  
 When did the stars of the sky arise? - *Titai*

Did you go to see it? Did your mother see it? - *Titai*  
 Did you and your mother together see it? - *Titai*

What is this strainer that sifts the syllables? - *Titai*  
 Women, you sift the syllables with the tongue. - *Titai*

Which is the broom that sweeps the Ganga? - *Titai*  
 Listen, it is the hair on the head. - *Titai*

How many are the heavenly stars? - *Titai*  
 Only one is the star in heaven. - *Titai*

The sky and the earth are locked up. - *Titai*  
 Where is the navel of the earth? - *Titai*

Four hundred and forty four are the links. - *Titai*  
 And forty locks for every link - *Titai*

*ii*

## Don't Go Away Mathevan, Sir!

What follows is a folksong of the peasants connected to their occupation, in the form of a dialogue between Mathevan, the farmer, and Mathevi, the peasant girl.

"Let me go, let me go, Mathevi, my lassie!  
Bring hither my palm-leaf umbrella;  
Bring hither my golden cane."

"Don't go away, O Mathevan, Sir!  
For bathing there's a pond here; for playing there's a ground."

"Let me go, let me go, Mathevi, my lassie!  
Bring hither my palm-leaf umbrella;  
Bring hither my golden cane."

"Don't go away, O Mathevan, Sir!  
You can leave after taking the gruel of rice.  
You can leave after chewing the betelnut pan."

"Let me go, let me go, Mathevi, my lassie!  
The ploughman and the buffalo are working in the field.  
The buffalo-shed is also in the field."

"Eat a little rice at noon, O Lord!  
Don't go away, O Mathevan, Sir!"

"The men and the workers are in the field;  
The women with the child too is in the field;  
The haggard old woman is also in the field.  
The men and the workers are at work in the field.  
Let me go, let me go, Mathevi, my lassie!"

"Don't go away, O Mathevan, Sir!  
For bathing there's a pond here; for playing there's a ground."

"The men and the workers will curse me;  
The women with the children will curse me;  
The men and the buffaloes will curse me;  
The haggard old women will curse me."

The wages will be paid only after I reach there.  
 Bring hither my palm-leaf umbrella;  
 Bring hither my golden cane;  
 Let me go, let me go, Mathevi, my lassie!

From *Natan Pattukal*, c. 14th-15th century      Tr. by Ayyappa Paniker .

*iii*

Far Far Away in the South

*Attinuntam tei*  
*Teithinunthare - tei tei*

Far far away in the South - *tei*  
 I went to see a bride - *tei-tei*  
*Attinuntam-tei teithinunthare—tei tei*

You should see the girl's eyes - *tei*  
 They flash like glass - *tei-tei*  
*Attinuntam- tei teithinunthare—tei tei*

You should see the girl's nose - *tei*  
 It's like the sesame flower - *tei-tei*  
*Attinuntam-tei teithinunthare—tei tei*

You should see the girl's forehead - *tei*  
 It's like a bow fully strung - *tei-tei*  
*Attinuntam-tei teithinunthare—tei tei*

You should see the girl's lips - *tei*  
 They are like redberries - *tei-tei*  
*Attinuntam-tei teithinunthare—tei tei*

You should see the girl's teeth - *tei*  
 They're like cucumber seeds - *tei*  
*Attinuntam-tei teithinunthare—tei tei*

You should see the girl's neck - *tei*  
 It's like a chiselled conch-shell  
*Attinuntam-tei teithinunthare—tei tei*

You should see the girl's hand - *tei*  
It's like a tender banana bud - *tei tei*  
*Attinuntam-tei teithinunthare—tei tei*

You should see the girl's breasts - *tei*  
They're like contending mounds-*tei-tei*  
*Attinuntam-tei teithinunthare—tei tei*

You should see the girl's belly - *tei*  
It's like a banyan leaf - *tei-tei*  
*Attinuntam-tei teithinunthare—tei tei*

You should see the girl's legs - *tei*  
They're like the shapely legs of a couch - *tei-tei*  
*Attinuntam-tei teithinunthare—tei tei*

Far, far away in the south - *tei*  
Where I went - *tei tei*  
I saw the festival of Onam - *tei*  
I saw the Onam-gift of clothes—*tei tei*

From *Natan Pattukal*, c. 14th-16th century

Tr. by Ayyappa Panikar

## The Killing of Darika

ANONYMOUS

There are numerous religious rituals involving the chanting of *mantras* and the singing of *stotras*. They have produced a considerable literature of invocation used for recitation accompanying performances. Most of them are sung in groups or by two persons to the accompaniment of cymbals and drums. Traditional singers belong to the sub-castes such as Unni or Kurup whose occupations pertain to temples. There are separate songs eulogising *Shastha* (son of Vishnu and Shiva), *Bhadra Kali* (daughter of Shiva) and *Ganapati* (Son of Shiva). In addition, there are *thottams* addressed to *Devakanni* (divine maid), *Kuttichathan*, (a sprite), *Bhairavan* (a spirit) and *Bhagavati* (Goddess). The most popular of these ritual songs is Bhadrakali thottam. Thottams are composed by unknown poets, though there is a version of Bhadrakali thottam attributed to the renowned poet Punam Nambutiri (14-15th century). Thottams have different versions in different regions. In this respect they are like ballads and folk songs. Their primary purpose is to invoke the deity concerned; their literary quality is only secondary. Each song contains a narration of an important event - for example, the killing of *Darika* (a demon) in Bhadrakali Thottam.

The Bhadrakali Thottam narrates how the demon Darika performed penance to propitiate Lord Shiva and how the Lord granted the boon he asked for, unmindful of the consequences. When the weapon was found to recoil on the Lord himself, Shiva, in his wrath, summoned Bhadrakali and asked her to kill the demon. Kali on the hill-top challenges Darika. The encounter is a prolonged one, for Darika uses many strategies and subterfuges. In a terrific move, Bhadrakali finally kills Darika and brings his head to Shiva. The song is metrical in form and is sung in different beats and rhythms to suit the changing emotional tempo.

## 1

## Darika's Penance

Darika the demon that he is,  
 Calls his dear forest-mate  
 Vanamurayal, her name,  
 Comes unto him hearing the call.  
 "Hear me O Vanamurayal,  
 We have been in the woods for long  
 No boon yet comes forth our way.  
 I shall go hence to Kailas  
 Stay there till a boon I get.  
 I shall soon be back enriched."  
 A piece of black cloth he tied deftly,  
 And with needles in his hand  
 Marched to Kailas; stopped he only  
 At the abode of the Almighty Shiva.  
 But the Lord did not mind him a bit,  
 Nor enquired why he came.  
 When unconcerned the Lord sat,  
 Darika stood on a needle and began his penance.  
 Still unmoved was the Lord  
 And hence Darika climbed a peepul tree.  
 Taking the piece of black cloth in hand  
 He bound himself to the tree.  
 Bound he his toes;  
 Head down he hung.  
 Goddess Parvati looked aghast  
 And rushed to her Lord panting:  
 "Darika is up in penance;  
 Lord, don't you hear me?  
 If you do not defuse the penance

Ill-omen shall befall Kailas."  
 Shri Mahadev, Lord incarnate  
 Defuses the penance so soon  
 And grants him the boons he sought.  
 Eager to test the boon acquired  
 He stood in front of the Lord  
 And gave it to the Giver himself.  
 Lo, it was small-pox, and all at once  
 The Lord shivered with fever,  
 High temperature and small-pox boils.  
 The devil ran up and fled Kailas.  
 Sad was the Lord as he lay  
 And lost the sight of His eye,  
 Lo: Kantakarna was born  
 Kantakarna, the Lord incarnate,  
 Licked the Lord from foot to neck  
 When the Lord said, "You stop;  
 Don't lick unto my face  
 Ten or fourteen days hence  
 These boils shall become ripe  
 And so you keep away from me  
 I shall make you lord of small-pox."

Darika the demon went down to the forest,  
 Made a pyre for sacrifice;  
 He cut off his flesh and offered it on a pyre  
 When the smoke did reach Shiva's matted locks,  
 The devas all fled.  
 Gone was their prowess,  
 Dwindled was their strength,  
 Darika, the demon that he is,  
 Strengthened his fort and armaments.  
 Standing outside the fort  
 He ordered the sun not to rise  
 For seven days at a stretch  
 He went into meditation  
 He chanted the mantra,  
 And he pointed his sword,  
 No sunlight was visible for days;  
 All worship in temple stopped.  
 Vishnumaya, the divine embodiment, came running  
 And she viewed the Lord laid up in grief,  
 The Lord thus spake to Vishnumaya:

"Listen, O Vishnu, to what I say,  
The demon Darika came to me,  
He performed all penances.  
I granted him all boons sought."

"What boons granted you unto Darika, my Lord?"

"I have granted him the boon  
That never shall he meet death  
At the hands of a man."

"Granted you that never shall he die of woman too?"

"No, I haven't granted that."

## 2

### The Birth of Bhadrakali

Grief-ridden was the Lord as He lay,  
Opened He His third eye,  
Whensoever it thus happened  
There was born Kāli the terrible.  
When Kāli, the terrible, was thus born  
The Lord lay grief-ridden.  
His third eye shone bright  
The Lord pulled at His tresses  
And struck. There was born Virabhadra.  
Kantakarna too arrived there  
And Kailas brightened like milk.  
"What is the reason, my father,  
That you beckoned me here?"  
"You followed a demon once;  
Cut off his head and brought it to me  
To behold. Now bring me the head of Darika."  
Bhadrakali, the mother of all, heard this,  
And mounted she atop an Elf,  
Alighted on a holy shrine atop the rock,  
Summoned she six Kālis, her companions,  
Gave them a bronze drum  
Atop the hill she climbed  
And struck the drum once.  
She gave a battle cry,  
Which resounded, Dārika heard it,  
The demon he is, he gathered  
An army, twelve thousand strong,  
Atop a nearby hill.

They too gave a single war cry.  
 All echoed the challenging cry,  
 And the army mysterious of Mother Goddess  
 Replied the war cry prompt.  
 The mother's army immense,  
 Her enemy's army immense,  
 Both entered the battle grim.  
 Darika's army was trounced.'

Darika's chieftain came running,  
 Stood before the demon and wailed:  
 "King, if you do not come now  
 Our army will be mercilessly slain",  
 Heard he these words,  
 The black cloth he tucked around well  
 War-sword bright he took in hand,  
 Came out into his yard to fight,  
 When the forest-dwelling damsel  
 Vanamurayal came up to hold him back.  
 "My husband should not go to war  
 Dear one, my lord, if you go to fight.  
 It will turn me into a widow."

"Damn it, you girl, don't be silly;  
 The power of the magic mantra is with me:  
 As long as I have it with me,  
 None shall come to conquer me."  
 "Husband dear, the magic mantra you give  
 Unto me and I shall wait in the woods."  
 "I shall give the magic mantra unto you,  
 and then go to fight with them:  
 But if I feel I will get defeated,  
 I will send a messenger when  
 You shall send it thro' him, my dear,  
 The power of the magic mantra,  
 Make a vow, and I shall leave it here."

Then she made a vow,  
 Darika, the demon, in secret  
 Whispered into the right ear of Vanamurayal,  
 Who was left behind in the woods.  
 Vanamurayal learnt the magic mantra  
 And Darika forgot it all at once.  
 The demon Darika then stood  
 Atop another hill to fight against  
 The daughter of the blue-necked Lord,



Who took a good look at him  
 Vishnumaya, the holy form of god,  
 Put on the attire of a messenger  
 And ran unto the forest inside.  
 Vishnumaya, the holy form of god, she called aloud,  
 Vanamuraya! in her forest abode  
 Saw the messenger coming,  
 Into the ear of the messenger  
 Whispered she the magic word she knew,  
 When Vishnumaya learnt the magic word,  
 Vanamuraya forgot it all at once.  
 Vishnumaya, the holy form of God, then  
 Whispered the word to Kanni, the Mother Kali;  
 When Kanni learnt the magic word  
 Vishnumaya forgot it all at once.

When she looked up to the sky  
 She felt swords divine—  
 One hundred and six in number,  
 Three-pronged holy spears ninety-six  
 Alight into her left hand:  
 A conch, a disc, solid and firm, and a rounded ring  
 She felt coming into her right hand;  
 A spear, a drum, a javelin, and a lance  
 She felt coming into her left hand;  
 A Poniard, a cutlass, and a dagger  
 She felt coming into her right hand;  
 A conch—a disc solid and firm, and a rounded ring  
 She felt coming into her left arm  
 When the primal form in possessive rage,  
 The holy form made its presence thus,  
 When three thousand million cobras  
 Matted firmly unto her hair,  
 Four thousand million vipers matted amidst,  
 Seven thousand million serpents each  
 Matted in between locks,  
 A wild elephant like a flower adorned the tresses  
 Or was it a pair, a pair of elephants,  
 That formed the ringlets on her majestic ears,  
 Dark elephants chained  
 Kantankali somersaulted thrice,  
 At noon stood Kali, the mother,  
 Lighting a single beacon.  
 At dusk stood, Kali, the mother,

Shouting a demonic call,  
 Changed she the night into a day  
 And the day into a night.  
 Turned she the hill into a ditch  
 And the ditch into a hill  
 The eight directions split apart,  
 Hearing her roaring and laughter.  
 And the demon Dārikā uttered words like these:  
 "Run, O run, my soldiers dear,  
 Run and hide somewhere."  
 Heard they these words, and took to their heels,  
 Their eyes struck by the disc,  
 Their feet bound by the fiery net,  
 They stood stupified, all!  
 Amidst the twelve-thousand strong army  
 Alighted mother Kāli in frenzy.  
 She was the primal form in possessive rage,  
 She shook her sword the first time and  
 Beheaded and scattered as dust  
 One thousand of Darika's soldiers lay  
 The Kālis, her maids, hurried to the spot,  
 To put on garlands intestinal  
 Bathed in blood were the Kālis  
 Burst were the heads of twelve thousand chieftains,  
 Renowned Dārikā was running in a hurry  
 When he took to his heels  
 Mother and one of the Kālis followed him  
 Running along in the forest wild.  
 He who fled to the woods  
     Called his wife and commanded her  
     To bring his spell of magic mantra  
     "O my husband dear, I gave it long back  
     To a messenger of yours."  
     "Sinner! you have betrayed me",  
     Thus spake Darika and fled from there.

3

### The Killing of Darika

In the flight after a while  
 He saw a *bilva* tree beside,

Climbed up to seek shelter  
And Mother with a Kali stood beneath.

"Dare you to climb a tree,  
having sighted me? I shall slay you  
Climb, as you may, any tree."

Hearing these words, he descended from the tree,  
Bewildered and in haste.

Kanni, the Mother, beheld him,  
She tightened her war robes,  
And climbed up the tree with effort,  
The mother with dark-matted locks  
Caught hold of Darika's hand,  
She cut and thrust and stepped aside  
*Othiram* and *Katakam*.

Twisting and turning in the fencing match  
She flung him up into the skies,  
Seeing him fall from above, Mother  
Raised her trident  
And on the middle prong stuck the falling Darika.  
Raising the spear in her hand

She asked Darika what he would say:

"Spare me, O Mother, don't kill me,  
Spare me, O daughter of Hara, the Lord!  
If you spare my humble self, I shall offer  
Any supplication unto you,

I shall perform for you, your favourite *Thottam* song,  
And the *Chinki* songs too I shall offer,  
I shall perform the ritual of *Thookkam*  
I shall perform the *chooralottam*  
I shall offer effigies of bulls,  
I shall offer effigies of horses,  
I shall offer the blood of roosters,  
I shall offer the blood of goats.

Mother took his body on the spearhead,  
Darika, the famous, was laid down at her feet.  
Mother beckoned Vetāḥ, who came rushing  
To the divine presence, and in obedience  
With bended knees sat in prayer.  
She held the head of Dārika unto the mouth of El;  
Her sword fixed in her right hand,  
She severed Darika's head.

She wrapped it in silken cloth,  
 She turned aside and saw  
 Kantakarna, the holy form of God,  
 At her rear side; and she handed over  
 The head to Kantakarna.  
 Darika's skin was torn off;  
 She put it on as her robe.  
 They made a cot of his hand and leg,  
 They made a drum of his shoulder bone;  
 Took out a bone of his slain body,  
 And held it up like a flame of victory.  
 Tore off she a nerve fibre,  
 Bent it unto a ring; Mother cut up  
 A six-feet tall Darika into a five-feet one,  
 She cut up a five feet Darika into a four-feet one;  
 She cut up a four-feet Darika into a three-feet one;  
 She cut up a three-feet Darika into a two-feet one;  
 She cut up a two-feet Darika into a one-foot one;  
 Then butchered she, the one-foot demon  
 The mighty one was reduced to shambles,  
 She flung the pieces to the Kalis and ghouls  
 His severed head, Kali brought  
 As a trophy of war to Lord Almighty  
 That Shri Mahadev may see for ever.  
 She took up the head and hung it  
 On the right branch of a peepul tree.  
 Alighting from the shoulder of a dragon,  
 Unto her father she ran and stood before Him.  
 He, the Lord, called his daughter dear,  
 Took her into his shrine.  
 Then he made the dear one stand there,  
 Changed her into a little baby,  
 Gave her a tray of flowers,  
 Told her, "Go to the garden of flowers  
 And play amidst them, to your heart's content,  
 You should come unto me  
 When I look for you with my mind's eye."  
 She then went into the flower garden  
 And played she there picking flowers.

## Songs from the North

ANONYMOUS

*Vatakkāṇ Pattukal* (Vatakkāṇ Pāṭṭukal, Songs from the North) are story-songs preserved and transmitted orally through centuries among the rustic people in the northern parts of Kerala. If a ballad, by definition, is to focus on a single crucial episode or situation with dramatic intensity, without becoming personal or subjective, *Vatakkāṇ Pattukal* fit in perfectly well with those specifications and can well be considered specimens of the ballad form at its best in Malayalam literature. Some four hundred of these were collected by Percy Macqueen while he was a Collector of Malabar District; a few of them have been published by the University of Madras.

*Vatakkāṇ Pattukal* are obviously of unknown authorship and are supposed to have been composed in the 16th century. Broadly, they deal with the heroic exploits of men and women belonging to certain families of North Malabar well-known for their valorous deeds. Thacholi, Puthooram, Attummanammel, Thonnooram Veedu, Palattu Veedu are some of the families about which mention is made in these songs. Of these, Puthooram and Thacholi are the most prominent ones and several of these songs sing the glories of the heroes and heroines born in these families. Puthooram family belongs to the Thiya community and Thacholi, the Nair community. In those days village feuds between local chieftains were decided through individual duels for which village warriors, well-versed in the art of combat, were engaged by the chieftains. *Vatakkāṇ Pattukal* makes mention of several such heroes. Aromal Chekavar, Aringodar, Aromunni, Thacholi Othenan, Thacholi Chandu, Palattu Komappan, Puthunadan Kelu and Karimparampil Kannan are some of them.

Most of the songs so far retrieved speak of the glories mainly of two families, Puthooram and Thacholi, and of these Thacholi stands out. The central figure is Thacholi Othenan, whose exploits are vividly described in several songs. He is the disciple of Mathiloor Gurukkal, and along with his friend Kandacheri Chappan, he goes about the villages, dispensing justice to everybody. Well-versed in several methods of combat and defence, including black magic, Othenan helps those who seek his help and stands against every offence against human decency. His love affairs and combats are celebrated in several songs. At the early age of 32, he is treacherously murdered by one of his adversaries after he has won the battle against them.

*i*

### Unniyarcha and Aromal Unni

The Puthooram songs centre around three figures—Aromal Chekavar, his sister Attummanammel Unniyarcha and her son Aromunni, all the three equally proficient

in individual combat. "Puthari Ankam" deals with the duel between Aromal Chekavar and Aringodar, the former engaged by Unnikkonar and the latter by Unnichandror, two brothers involved in a family feud. Aromal Chekavar kills Aringodar in the fight, but his victory is short-lived. His own cousin, Chandu who has some understanding with Aringodar and some grievance against Aromal Chekavar, treacherously murders Aromal. The excerpt given below deals with the futile attempt made by Unniyarcha to prevent her brother from going to the duel which, she feels, will only end in disaster.

Long past the midnight hour  
 statuesque Unniyarcha,  
 daughter-in-law  
 of the Attummanammel clan,  
 arose from her sleep,  
 astir with unease,  
 remembering an ominous dream.  
 She had seen Aromal Unni,  
 her brother, handsomest jewel  
 of the Puthooram clan,  
 set out for his very first duel.  
 To the progenitors of her clan  
 she prayed and to the souls  
 of the dead that hover  
 around the battlefields, in fact,  
 to all the familial deities,  
 entreating, please save him,  
 save my brother Aromal Unni.  
 She straightened her clothes  
 and tidied her hair,  
 she lit a lamp to light up  
 the eastern gateway of the house.  
 She stooped to touch the earth  
 with her troubled brow.  
 She folded palms to salute the sun.  
 Then swept the courtyard clean  
 and cooked some rice with lentils  
 over the spluttering fragrant fire,  
 filled the pewters that held  
 five pints or more,  
 set out on banana leaves  
 the burnt husk of paddy  
 for brightening the teeth.  
 Then she called out,

as gently as she could,  
Oh father, Oh mother,  
arise now from your sleep,  
I have drawn the water  
for your wash,  
your breakfast of gruel  
is cooked and ready.  
The old ones asked,  
Oh Unniyarcha,  
why have you cooked our breakfast  
so early, the cock has only begun  
to crow.  
I have my reasons,  
said Unniyarcha  
I dreamt of my brother  
going out for a duel,  
I saw him go out  
to fight his very first duel.  
I must therefore hasten home  
to make sure that he doesn't.  
The dream certainly had  
a message meant for me.  
The old man said,  
dreams are untrustworthy,  
besides, pregnant that you are,  
you cannot walk your way home.  
Oh, but I must go, she cried,  
I must stop him  
before it is too late.  
Her husband's mother said,  
you cannot always have your way.  
You brought us bad luck, woman,  
my son has been falling ill  
in the wake of your arrival here.  
I shall not allow my son  
to go as escort to your home.  
He is needed here,  
said her husband's father,  
he is to be hired out for combat  
to earn for each duel he wins  
a thousand coins or more.  
You may take with you a serf.  
Unniyarcha's cheeks

flamed in anger. She said,  
girls of the illustrious  
Puthooram clan  
have not ever travelled with  
a common serf. Your conventions  
are indeed unfamiliar to me.  
For seven generations and more  
we have been chieftains  
wherever we lived,  
with the prerogatives of the rich.  
Our men have gone to combat  
either to win or to die,  
both ways they earned their fame.  
Cheraman Perumal, once  
the ruler of the Coast,  
honoured my ancestor  
with gifts and accolades.  
How dare you expect  
a daughter of that clan  
to travel escorted by a serf?  
Wiping a reddened eye,  
she oiled her luxuriant hair  
and climbed the hedged boundaries  
of the land, past the flowering  
mango trees, past the peepul,  
high on the hill, she walked  
to halt on the banks  
of the Kumara(ka)m river,  
where it thinned down to a stream,  
Take me across the water,  
she cried, but the ferryman  
said no, not unless you pay the fare.  
Then she unclasped her gold  
necklace, and of the pendants  
with auspicious etchings,  
she took one off the string  
for the boatman as her fare.  
When he saw the family crest  
he fell at her feet and cried  
I have erred as human beings do  
once or twice in a lifetime,  
forgive me my ignorance.



I could at first guess  
that I was to row across  
a daughter of the Puthooram clan.  
The Chekavar will kill me  
if he only knew what I said.  
Beauteous Unniyarcha,  
daughter of the Puthooram clan,  
walked past the palace gates,  
the Ezhava serfs  
in the coconut groves  
paused in their work  
to admire her long-legged gait.  
Past the shadowed meadows  
and skirting the market square  
she walked on and on  
to descend into fields where  
ricestalks swayed  
ripening in the sun.  
Aromal Unni,  
stalwart scion of the Puthooram clan,  
saw his sister stalk the fields  
alone and unescorted,  
with oil dripping from her hair,  
clothes crumpled and dusty,  
and rose from his seat  
perturbed.  
She has come to stop me  
from going to the duel  
How could she have known  
of the duel to be?  
Unniyarcha fell at her  
mother's feet, she sought  
blessing and later cried,  
where is my brother?  
The old woman sighed.  
He is not fated to partake  
of all that is rightfully his,  
she said, wiping a reddened eye.  
Unniyarcha entered the Kalari,  
the family's gymnasium, and  
found her brother  
poised and ready,  
armed for the duel.

At the sight of him  
 she fainted. Aromal Unni  
 cried out to his wife,  
 Kunhunnooli, did you not hear  
 my sister fall?  
 Pregnant that she is,  
 she is in no condition  
 to lie on the floor.  
 Kunhunnooli helped her  
 sister-in-law to rise and  
 asked, what makes you  
 cower so, in fear?  
 When your father went for combat  
 did his sister ever fall in a faint?  
 The potentate who had arrived  
 with a posse of Nayar guards  
 to hire Aromal Unni  
 for fighting his duels for him  
 jumped up from his seat  
 disturbed by the beauty's fall.  
 Remain seated, cried  
 Aromal Unni,  
 this is none other than my sister,  
 my one and only sister,  
 and then the visitor cried,  
 a sister to match her brother,  
 never have I seen a more radiant pair.  
 On the Kalari floor  
 Unniyarcha stood beside  
 her brother.  
 He wiped her tear-stained face  
 with a corner of his sash,  
 asking, Oh sister,  
 why do you still cry?  
 Well past the midnight hour,  
 she said,  
 I saw you in a dream.  
 I saw you poised and ready  
 to go off for your very first duel.  
 When I asked for permission  
 to come visiting here,  
 my mother-in-law said  
 that I should come here with a serf!

Her brother led her to a couch,  
a couch with lac-stained legs  
and, making her sit down, he said,  
remember what I tell you now,  
do not attempt  
to stop me from going to the duel,  
A Chekavar earns his name  
only by fighting duels,  
only in marriage  
a woman finds fulfilment,  
only a sacred thread  
can mark out a Brahmin,  
only a sceptre can turn  
its wielder into a king.  
Then Unniyarcha cried,  
if you go to the duel now,  
from the rafters of this gym  
I shall hang myself to death.  
Oh deities of war,  
how can I learn to forget  
this beloved brother of mine?  
Then in her grief  
and despair she fainted again  
and again and again  
Aromal Unni chanted incantations,  
a hundred times he chanted  
and fed her water  
poured out from a conch.  
Unniyarcha, dearest one, listen,  
I shall now disclose  
all the reasons for my choice.  
I am now twenty-two  
and according to the astrologers  
Jupiter is now in my eighth house  
and Saturn's shadow is upon me.  
Death I cannot now escape.  
Bali the valiant king  
died of an arrow  
shot from the back,  
Jupiter was in his eighth house  
and Saturn's malefic eye was on him.  
If I must surely die,  
let me die in a duel

bringing gold and honour  
to my clan and yours.  
He removed his signet ring  
and put it on her finger.  
Unniyarcha, if your first-born  
happens to be a boy,  
name him after me, he said,  
teach him all the martial arts,  
teach him what courage  
is meant to be,  
teach him what honour costs.  
A timid Chekavar must  
disgrace both his clan  
and his country . . . .  
When our father in his youth  
fought those innumerable duels,  
his sister did not weep.  
Do not ever weaken my will.  
From the zenana  
Kunhunnooli asked her sister-in-law  
despite your pleas and tears  
he has decided to fight,  
he is lusting for his enemy's blood.  
Then she wept aloud  
and unashamed  
beating her breasts and wailing.  
The old mother asked the girls,  
why do you weep and wail  
when he is about to leave?  
Your father fought innumerable  
battles, and although  
his mother was alive  
there was no wailing then.  
His uncles watched him go  
suffering in stately silence.  
Please believe in God's fair  
decisions . . . .  
Well past the midnight hour  
Kunhunnooli entered the gym  
bearing a pewter filled to the brim  
and many a wicked  
rotary lamp.

Are you asleep  
or awake, she asked her husband  
in voice, softened  
with tears.

Aromal Unni was enraged.  
How dare you enter the gym  
on the eve of my departure?  
You know of the vows of celibacy  
that precede the traditional duel  
Do not lure me to go astray  
I have no such intention,  
said Kunhunnooli.

Knowing your thirst  
on a warm night like this  
I have come to serve you water.

Aromal Unni took the pewter from her hands  
and gulped down the water  
she had brought.

From behind the carved pillar  
the young wife watched  
as he held the pewter high and drank.  
May I follow you to the duel?  
She asked in a tremulous voice.  
He shook his head.

Did my mother ever follow  
my father to the duels?  
What I am fated to be  
I shall be, he said,  
either a winner or a corpse.

Aromal Unni,  
noblest scion of the Puthooram clan,  
asked his wife to leave him alone.

And she set up  
a heart-rending wail,  
a wail that sounded like  
young bamboo stacks splitting,  
ripped apart by the wind.  
She clasped her husband's feet  
asking how can I forget you,  
how can I learn to forget,  
forget the monsoon clouds of your tresses,  
forget the crescent moon of your brow,  
the narrowing eyes,  
the reddened lips,

the pale coral of your teeth,  
 the conch shell of your throat,  
 the tinea on your chest  
 resembling a reindeer's spots,  
 the belly,  
 flat as a peepul leaf,  
 the turtle-curve of your back,  
 the deep shadows of your thighs,  
 Oh how can I ever forget  
 all these that make you what you are?  
 Aromal Unni weakened then,  
 the tears rose in his narrow eyes.  
 Do not grieve, he said,  
 if I die in my very first duel,  
 my younger brother shall wed you,  
 my brother Unni Kannan . . . .  
 But not hearing his words,  
 she cried, I am only sixteen,  
 and you twenty-two.  
 How can I learn to forget you  
 and the moments of love that I shared with you?

From *Vatakkann Pattukal*, 16th century

Tr. by Kamala Das

## ii

### Othenan and Odathil Kunhicheeru

For the folklorist, Northern Kerala provides a fertile field of investigation. Not less than four hundred ballads of anonymous authorship have been collected from the region by Percy McQueen, the District Collector of Malabar. These mainly deal with the fortunes of two warrior families of the region around Kadathanad, the Thacholi (Taccōli) family and the Puthooram (Puttūram) family, and the heroic exploits of two warriors, Thacholi Othenan (Otēnan) and Aromal Chekavar. The petty internecine clashes between local chieftains and the martial training given to the young through several military schools, known as Kalaris, provide the backdrop to these ballads, in which deeds of valour and romance are interwoven and narrated in a down-to-earth style.

The following selection deals with one of the romantic interludes in the life of Thacholi Othenan.

Young Othenan of the Thacholi house is loafing around with his friend Chappan of Kandacheri when he sees the lovely Cheeru of Odathil house bathing in the pond. He is smitten by her beauty. Chappan tells Othenan

that the girl is married to Rairu of Pooraparambu, who has been away in another land for six months. Othenan starts visiting the girl who enters into an adulterous relationship with him. On Rairu's return, he finds that she is pregnant. When asked to explain the mystery (her pregnancy is four months old even though Rairu has been away for six months), Cheeru, as advised by Othenan, tells him that the goddess of Olavannur Kavu granted her wish to have a baby. She also tells him that Rairu visited her during several nights in her dream and that he himself was responsible for her pregnancy. She even adds that her pledge given to the goddess is that she would not breastfeed the child, if she gets one, until the child is presented at the feet of the goddess forty days after childbirth.

After the birth of the child, explaining the resemblance in facial features between the baby and Thacholi Othenan, she tells her husband that she had prayed to the goddess for a child as valiant and brave as Othenan.

When forty days are over, Rairu and his wife go to Olavannur Kavu and fulfil the vow of offering made to the goddess. Othenan visits them and all are happy.

Young and handsome Thacholi Othenan,  
 his bosom friend Kandacheri Chappan:  
 together they set out on a journey.  
 On their way back from the long journey,  
 they saw the pretty damsel Odathil Kunhicheeru  
 bathing in the pond.  
 While Cheeru was bathing in the pond,  
 Othenan saw her with his own eyes;  
 he said to his bosom friend;  
 "Who is that girl, my friend,  
 bathing in the pond?  
 A girl so beautiful  
 there is not in our Meppayil.  
 Even in a palace  
 such a damsel is rare, indeed!"  
 Quick came the reply from Chappan:  
 "That girl is the daughter  
 of Odathil Kunhichanthu.  
 Her name is Kunhicheeru;  
 she is the wedded wife  
 to Rairu of Poorapparambu,  
 who has embarked on a long journey.  
 When he started his journey  
 he had warned her:  
 'You should never stir  
 out of our house,

until I return from the journey'.  
 Having said so  
 Rairu looked at her;  
 it would seem as if  
 she were his daughter.  
 When Rairu comes back from the journey,  
 never shall he leave her alone for a night;  
 bathing and supping would be together.  
 He is so attached to the girl  
 that he would ask her to sit down  
 and he would sit down along with her."  
 Then came the reply from Othenan:  
 "My dear Chappan,  
 her breasts and her top and her features  
 show she is just fourteen.  
 It seems that girl is for me;  
 I want to spend my nights with her.  
 What shall I do for it, my friend?  
 I want to spend my nights with her  
 before Rairu returns from the journey."  
 Kandacheri replied:  
 "My dear friend,  
 Cheeru doesn't care for her man;  
 she would never obey him.  
 If she had willed so,  
 he wouldn't have gone on the journey.  
 There she stands after her bath;  
 why don't you go and ask?"  
 Othenan went to the bank of the pond  
 and spoke to her:  
 "My dear Kunhicheeru,  
 tell me if you have come of age,  
 tell me who your husband is;  
 do not hesitate, tell me his name."

Quick came the reply:  
 "My husband's name is Kuhan Rairu,  
 who hails from Pooraparambu. .  
 I came of age at twelve  
 and I am fourteen now.  
 Though I gave birth to a child  
 at the age of thirteen,  
 the baby breathed its last  
 forty days after its birth.



It will be four or five months  
before my man returns from the journey."  
Quick came the question from Othenan:  
"Shall I come to your house, my darling,  
and spend a night with you?"  
Pat came the reply:  
"If my husband comes to know of it,  
he wouldn't keep me alive;  
so you may come without his knowledge."  
Othenan hummed assent  
and said he would visit her.  
Kunhicheeru finished her bath  
and started for home.  
When she reached her house  
she cleaned her room and made her bed  
and, as she sat waiting there,  
Othenan reached her house  
at the twilight hour.  
Quickly he reached her chamber  
and sat on the golden bed of cane.  
"Beloved Kunhicheeru", he said,  
"I shall be here with you  
till your man returns."  
Thus spoke he  
and stayed in the house.  
Having spent the night with her,  
he woke up early in the morning  
and said to his beloved:  
"Prepare the betel and nut for me,  
I'm leaving now;  
I'll be back here at the twilight hour."  
She gave him betel and nut  
and saw him leave.  
Things went on like this for months  
till it was found  
that she was four months with child.  
Then she said to Othenan:  
"I am now four months with child, my dear.  
If my husband comes to know of it,  
he will not let me live;  
what shall I do now, my man?"

Quick came the reply from Othenan:  
 "If your husband comes now,  
 you may tell him as I tell you  
 without hesitation:  
 'My dear husband,  
 while you were gone away,  
 I had a wonderful dream of you,  
 that you used to come  
 and make love to me.  
 This dream repeated four or five months  
 and now I find, I am four months pregnant.  
 Our first baby had prematurely died  
 and I was yearning for another;  
 You too would have yearned for one.  
 By your spirit has this been caused.  
 I gave birth to a baby in my thirteenth year.  
 True that I fondled the baby,  
 but, alas! I couldn't fondle and feed it enough.  
 My yearning could never cease.  
 To the goddess of Olavannur Kavu  
 I had made a solemn vow  
 that when her festival is on,  
 and when her ceremonial head-gear turns to the east,  
 I would offer a display of fireworks,  
 throw a thousand coconuts and sing her hymns  
 and offer her chains of gold,  
 if I could conceive a child now.  
 Thus made I a lot of vows  
 and, lo and behold! as I was sleeping  
 I dreamed a golden dream of you.  
 These dreams lingered for five long months  
 And look, I am with child for more than four months.  
 And now when I sleep,  
 My ancestors, dead and gone,  
 all throng in my dream and tell me thus:  
 'You gave birth to a child at thirteen,  
 but alas! you couldn't fulfil your urge  
 to fondle and feed the child.  
 Now that you are pregnant again,  
 you will give birth to a child;  
 and when that child is forty days old,  
 take your child

when the goddess of Olavannur<sup>7</sup>Kavu  
 turns her festive head-gear to the east  
 and present it at her feet.  
 Then, after giving your offerings to the goddess,  
 you may breastfeed your child.  
 Till then you shall not breastfeed it,  
 but give it some other food'.  
 When you husband comes back  
 you shall tell him  
 that you have seen such a wondrous dream."  
 Cheeru laughed heartily;  
 and as time passed,  
 and six months gone,  
 Rairu came back;  
 he entered the Odathil house,  
 and heard the gossip.  
 He rushed to his wife,  
 and Cheeru, seeing her husband rushing to her,  
 welcomed him.  
 with a potful of water to wash his feet.  
 Rairu asked her:  
 "What a strange piece of news it is!  
 How old is your pregnancy?  
 Today have I completed six months of my journey,  
 and I hear that your pregnancy is five months old!  
 What a strange thing it is;  
 I can't comprehend it at all."

Quick came her reply:  
 "When you embarked on your journey, my dear,  
 I made a vow to the deity:  
 that if I get pregnant  
 I would offer her a golden chain  
 and a display of fireworks  
 and make a gift of a thousand coconuts and hymns  
 when the goddess turns east  
 with her festive head-gear.  
 If I give birth to a baby,  
 I shall take it to the goddess  
 and arrange for his first feed of rice:  
 these were the vows I made.  
 When I was thirteen

I had given birth to a babe,  
but alas! I couldn't fulfil my urge  
to fondle and feed the child.  
As I was lying at night,  
thinking of the vows I made  
I dreamed of you, my dear husband.  
In my dream your visits were frequent  
and you were sleeping with me in our chamber.  
Once I woke up from sleep  
and was thinking only of you.  
Again as I went to sleep,  
I dreamt an unusual dream.  
All my dead ancestors  
appeared before me in the dream  
and told me:  
'Kunhicheeru, you have become pregnant;  
this babe is the result of your holy vows,  
and your pregnancy is five months old.  
When you give birth to this child  
and forty days pass,  
if you want to breastfeed the child,  
take it to the feet  
of the goddess of Olavannur Kavu,  
and only then shall you breastfeed the child.  
You gave birth to your first babe at thirteen,  
but alas! you couldn't fulfil your urge  
to fondle and feed the child.  
This babe at least you should look after well'  
When they finished these words,  
I was startled from my sleep,  
and I thought thus in my mind:  
'What a strange dream is this!  
How wonderful are things;  
My dear husband, you may remember,  
When I was thirteen and got pregnant,  
what things I had craved for,  
and you fulfilled every one of my cravings  
And now, may be because I am pregnant due to my holy  
vows,  
I don't crave for a single thing!  
My mind doesn't linger on anything  
except that I wish to see you."

Quick came the reply from Rairu—  
 he was thinking in his mind  
 that Cheeru's words were true:  
 "When you deliver the child,  
 we shall take the babe to the goddess,  
 and shall fulfil the holy vows  
 as you had planned in your mind,  
 and if you have any craving for anything,  
 I am here to fulfil them all."

Said Kunhicheeru:

"Dear husband,  
 this time, when I am pregnant  
 I don't crave for anything  
 When I was pregnant at thirteen,  
 I was not so fat as this,  
 and lo! I am fat and strong now;  
 something there is in me, I feel;  
 the goddess at Olavannur Kavu  
 is, it seems, pleased with me.  
 And as my pregnancy advances,  
 whatever I attempt seems to bear fruit;  
 indeed, this babe is blessed."

Rairu had this to say:

"When you complete your ten months,  
 I shall engage four women  
 to look after you at childbirth,  
 and don't object to that, Kunhicheeru."  
 While they were talking thus,  
 lo, there came Thacholi Kunhi Othenan.  
 He was coming up the steps  
 and he was greeted by Rairu:  
 "My dear Othenan, what brings you here?"

And Othenan replied thus:

"My dear Rairu,  
 while you were away on your journey,  
 I heard that Odathil Cheeru  
 was big with child—thank God.  
 She had made many an offering;  
 I came here to learn the truth.  
 When the goddess of Olavannur Kavu  
 turns east with her head-gear,  
 whatever promises of offering we make,

they will all be fulfilled.  
I've seen many such things;  
that's why I came here,  
just to know the truth."  
Rairu then said to him:  
"Odathil Kunhicheeru, dear to us,  
gave birth to a child  
at the age of thirteen,  
and ere the child was forty days old,  
it died, and poor little Kunhicheeru,  
couldn't fulfil her urge  
to fondle and breastfeed the little one.  
She then took the vow of an offering  
to the goddess of Olavannur Kavu  
and so she became big with child;  
she had a pleasant dream  
for five consecutive months  
that I was sleeping with her.  
Her pregnancy is now five months old  
and she doesn't have any cravings  
nor does she long to eat anything.  
She has put on weight;  
and look, my dear friend,  
you may speak to her."  
Othenan, having heard this,  
couldn't repress his smile  
and he asked her,  
as if he didn't know anything:  
"Dear Odathil Kunhicheeru,  
I have heard the news."  
Taking care that Rairu doesn't hear them,  
Kunhicheeru told him:  
"I told my husband  
what you wanted me to tell him,  
and my husband thought it's all true  
and hence he speaks to you thus."  
Said Othenan:  
"When your baby completes forty days  
I'll certainly come to see the darling.  
And remember, many a wish  
that you harboured in your heart  
I fulfilled in your pregnancy.

I no longer entertain any wish,  
and together we have tricked that Rairu.  
Now look after the baby well."

Othenan left with these words,  
chewing betel nut,  
and as time passed  
at the end of ten months  
Cheeru gave birth to a bright little boy.  
Rairu paid the midwife well  
and lavishly celebrated the occasion  
with gifts and adornments.  
He then told Kunhicheeru:  
"Don't you breastfeed the child, my dear:  
till we fulfil our vow to the goddess,  
you may give him cow's milk."  
Cheeru said to him:  
"I had made another vow  
to the goddess of Olavannur Kavu  
and prayed to her to give me  
a boy like Othenan,  
valiant and skilled in martial arts.  
I had offered such a prayer,  
and it has been fulfilled, my dear.  
What a strange thing is this!  
Have you seen the boy now?  
He is an exact replica of Othenan."  
Rairu took the child,  
and scanned him in daylight  
and he said:  
"How true are your words, my dear!  
He is exactly like Othenan!"  
And as time passed  
and forty days after the child was born,  
Rairu said to Kunhicheeru:  
"It is festival in Olavannur Kavu,  
let's go there with our baby."  
Gold and money she took  
and with the babe  
she went to Olavannur Kavu.  
When the goddess turned east with her head-gear  
she decked her with a bright chain of gold  
and made many an offering

of fireworks, coconuts and hymns.  
 She did all that was needed  
 and she took the babe  
 and placed it in front of the goddess.  
 The goddess blessed the babe,  
 and showered flowers and rice on its head;  
 then Kunhicheeru took the babe  
 and gave it the milk of her breast.  
 And lo! the babe  
 wanted the breastmilk evermore.  
 Rairu said to Kunhicheeru:  
 "For forty days after its birth  
 this babe of ours hasn't been fed on breastmilk,  
 and that's why he is so greedy;  
 and let us now go from here."  
 They then returned to the Odathil house  
 and happily spent their days.  
 And as they spent their days happily  
 Othenan came to visit them.  
 Rairu asked him:  
 "Have you seen my son, dear Othenan?  
 When my wife completed  
 ten months of pregnancy,  
 it seems she made prayer  
 to the goddess of Olavannur Kavvu:  
 'The babe I give birth  
 should be equal to Othenan in deed and valour,  
 and if this shall be so,  
 and if the babe shall display the qualities of Othenan,  
 I shall make an offering of a chain of gold  
 to the goddess of Olavnnur Kavvu'.  
 After making such a prayer,  
 she gave birth to a baby  
 at the end of ten months,  
 and lo! when she looked at the babe,  
 she found that the darling was just like you.  
 And we see it is still like that.  
 After forty days,  
 we took him to the Olavannur temple  
 to fulfil the vow  
 and after we fulfilled the vow  
 she gave breastmilk to the child.  
 Look, Othenan, look at the babe."



Othenan took the babe  
 and placed it on his lap;  
 he looked at Cheeru's face  
 and had a hearty laugh, and said:  
 "My dear Odathil Kunhicheeru,  
 forget that it's Rairu's child,  
 It is verily a gift from the goddess.  
 Look after the babe well.  
 Though you had given birth at thirteen,  
 You couldn't keep the babe for long;  
 hence, look after this babe well.  
 Since you got it through a divine boon  
 fondle the darling with care and love."  
 Othenan looked at Cheeru's face  
 and lifted the child in his arms  
 and put it on Cheeru's lap.  
 And lo! Odathil Kunhicheeru  
 fed it on breastmilk and put it to sleep.  
 Rairu said to Othenan:  
 "Tarry awhile and chew betel nut."  
 Othenan chewed betel nut and went his way.  
 And they lived happily ever after.

From *Vatakkal Pattukal*, 16th century

Tr. by C.P. Sivadasan

## The Killing of Kalakeya

### KOTTAYAM THAMPURAN

KOTTAYAM THAMPURAN (Kōṭṭayam Tampurān), the author of *Kalakeyavadham* (Kālakēyavadham), was born in the royal family of Kottayam in North Malabar, probably in the latter half of the seventeenth century. He seems to have composed his plays not long after the age of Kottarakara Thampuran, the founder of Kathakali.

Kottayam Thampuran wrote a series of four plays — *Bakavadham*, *Kalyanasaugandhikam*, *Kirmeeravadham* and *Nivatakavachakalakeyavadham* (*Kalakeyavadham* in short) — all of them based on episodes from Mahabharata. In the composition of these plays, Thampuran deftly handles the plot to suit the nature of Kathakali. Where the situation demands, he has also taken liberties with the original story and made innovations in the plot. His plays strictly adhere to all the stage conventions of Kathakali, and therefore they are highly effective on the stage. The plays also reveal his mastery over the complicated *manipravala* style.

*Kalakeyavadham* deals with the exploits of Arjuna in *Swarga* (heaven), after he receives the divine arrow of Pashupata from Lord Shiva. Indra summons Arjuna to *Swarga*, and entrusts him with the task of killing the two *asuras*, Nivatakavacha and Kalakeya, who pose a threat to his suzerainty. The exchange between Urvashi and Arjuna takes place during his stay in *Swarga*, culminating in Urvashi's curse on Arjuna that he would turn into a eunuch, and this curse he puts to good uses during his stay incognito in King Virata's palace.

According to the original source, Indra designates Urvashi, the celestial damsel, to seduce Arjuna, but according to the Kathakali version, Urvashi falls in love with the handsome Arjuna and approaches him to fulfil her wish. This deviation enhances the literary and theatric potential of the situation and affords the actor in the role of Urvashi with a lot of scope for portraying the changing moods of longing, intense erotic passion, frustration, anger and so on. The language of the play, though ornamental and replete with long compounds and figures of speech like alliteration and pun, is expressive and forceful.

The following passage presents first Urvashi talking to her friend about her love for Arjuna and then Urvashi's meeting with Arjuna:

*Setting her eyes on Arjuna, the ornament of the lunar dynasty,  
The enchanter of young maidens and the rider of a white horse,  
Moon-faced Urvashi, the crest-jewel of celestial damsels,  
Attracted and distracted by the lord of love, spoke thus to her friend:*

Urvashi: Ah, when I behold the figure of Arjuna,  
he seems to radiate the creative skills of Brahma to perfection.

Long ago, Lord Shiva had burnt the god of love to death—  
in his place Brahma has created Arjuna.  
My long-haired, fair-faced friend,  
I am distracted by the sight of his lips,  
which far excel the corals and ripe *bimba* fruit.  
Could that face be the full moon, or a lotus?  
His radiance makes gold look pale.  
How can I ever describe the beauty of his ears?  
Promptly you must go to him,  
and describe my distress to him, my friend,  
my noble lady!  
His eyebrows resemble an arched bow;  
his teeth—aren't they lovely like a pearl,  
a jasmine bud, or a piece of mirror,  
or the glory of the god of love?  
There is no simile apt enough,  
O my lotus-eyed friend, supreme among lovely damsels.

His voice puts the *vina* to shame;  
 his hands raise joy in my heart.  
 If you recount to him the pangs of my love,  
 not losing a single moment,  
 my friend, it will enhance your prestige.

*Hearing the words of Urvashi,  
 The first and foremost among heavenly courtesans,  
 Drawn to Arjuna, the son of Lord Indra,  
 Her trusted friend spoke thus to her;  
 To which Urvashi later responded :*

FRIEND: Noble and graceful one,  
 dear friend, listen to my words now!  
 He is pre-eminent, valiant, generous,  
 and comparable to Vishnu himself.  
 If it results in your union,  
 it is proper to set your heart on him.  
 But do not yet be overcome by love  
 before knowing what is in his mind.  
 Once we had gone to break someone's penance,  
 but ended up in failure.

URVASHI: My dear, sagacious and quick-witted you are;  
 please take pity on me.  
 Suggest a suitable means for it  
 which will not be disastrous.

FRIEND: Go to him when he is alone;  
 tell him about your passion;  
 When you favour him with an enchanting smile.  
 he will fall for you;  
 even honey-seeking bees will go only to fragrant flowers.

*Graceful in the movement of steps,  
 Adorned with dazzling ornaments,  
 Tender, yet majestic in her poise  
 Urvashi approached Arjuna, like a gnomonic dictum:*

*Love-lorn Urvashi, stricken with the lotus arrows of the god of love,  
 Went to Arjuna, the abode of the amorous essence of Draupadi,  
 The daughter of King Drupada, stately like the tree of paradise,  
 And spoke strongly these indistinct words of passion:*

URVASHI: Save me. I am enamoured of you,  
 afflicted with the arrows of the god of love.  
 Prince, adept at annihilating hordes of enemies  
 within a matter of seconds!  
 Benevolent prince,  
 to protect those who seek refuge  
 is the duty of your royal clan.  
 O Arjuna, clasp me swiftly in tight embrace.  
 Let my breasts relish the fulfilment.  
 Illustrious one of the Kuru dynasty,  
 give me your red lips;  
 don't, please don't delay it anymore.  
 Ah, do not strike me with your eyebrows,  
 graceful like an arched bow.  
 Place your soft hands on my breasts,  
 which captivate the minds of the young.  
 O Prince! handsome as the god of love,  
 let me regale your ears  
 with the nectar of love's endearments;  
 put out this irrepressible fire of passion  
 with sweet honey from your lips. . .

*Urvashi appeared to Arjuna as a harlot, setting her heart  
 Wantonly on other men, speaking improper and contemptible words,  
 Her heart distraught at the thought of separation from other men,  
 And he became full of loathing for her.*

ARJUNA: Know that your words are quite improper;  
 they are futile.  
 What should not happen will never lead to happiness.  
 Do swans ever crave for common weeds,  
 instead of lotus-stalks?  
 Alas, does a she-elephant fancy a deer, tell me.  
 Your desire for a mortal will invite ridicule;  
 it is raving insanity, not good for you!  
 King Pururavas had once accepted your hand;  
 that makes you equal to my own mother;  
 this would lead to the terrible sin of incest.  
 This is improper,  
 O crest-jewel of heavenly damsels.  
 A great sage by the name Narayana  
 bestowed you on my father,  
 the king of gods, as his consort.  
 Do not lose your senses, smitten by the arrows of love;  
 whoever strays from the rightful path  
 is a sinner; this is improper.

O woman with a mellifluous voice,  
 your shamelessness is excessive.  
 When good people hear of it,  
 they'll denounce you.  
 If Yudhishthira, my elder brother, comes to know,  
 will he tolerate it?  
 Your mind seems to be rash and cruel;  
 this is improper.

*In reply to the words of Arjuna  
 Which went against her own wishes,  
 That celestial damsel, crossed in love,  
 Spoke thus:*

URVASHI: Whatever it may be, it's not good for you!  
 I am distressed—  
 have you no pity for me?  
 Is your heart like a stone?  
 There seems no doubt about it now.  
 Is this due to your fight with Shiva,  
 the enemy of the god of love,  
 or your friendship with Krishna,  
 the father of the god of love reincarnate?  
 What else is the reason  
 for you not feeling the passion of love?  
 You fatuous idiot,  
 was it not your own mother  
 who, after having slept with the sun-god,  
 gave herself, without any scruples,  
 to his son, the god of death, in love's merriment?  
 Will anyone dare speak thus  
 to lovely damsels, without any hesitation?  
 Watch the consequences promptly:  
 you will turn into a eunuch, for sure.

From *Kalakeyavadham* 17th-18th century

Tr. by T. N. Sudha

## The Tale of Nala

UNNAYI VARIER

Among the major *attakkathas* or Kathakali plays, *Nalacharitam* (Nalacaritam), written by UNNAYI VARIER (Unṇāyi Vārier, 17th-18th century), stands in incomparable isolation because of the everlasting human appeal of the story,

masterly depiction of delicate feelings and discerning, sensitive use of language. Varier was born in Irinjalakkuda near Trichur and seems to have lived in the latter part of the seventeenth century. Very little is known about his life and career. The authorship of two more works—*Ramapanchasati*, a devotional poem in Sanskrit, and *Girjakalyanam*, an epic in the Manipravala mode of poetry—is also attributed to him.

In *Nalacharitam* he tells the story of Nala, the king of Nishadha, and his queen Damayanti, the daughter of king Bhima. It was a divine swan who acted as an emissary of love before they got married. They had got the blessings of the gods, but Kali, the evil spirit, intervenes to bring about their ruin and separation. After a series of mishaps which includes an encounter with a woodsman, Damayanti returns to her parents. Nala, meanwhile, is stung by a serpent whom he saves from forest-fire and this injection of poison turns him into dark-featured Bahuka. In this disguise he becomes the charioteer of King Rituparna. Damayanti, suspecting that Bahuka was Nala in disguise, manages to get Rituparna over to her palace under the pretext of a second marriage. This prepares the way for the reunion of Nala and Damayanti.

The author transforms the story into a lyrico-dramatic text of admirable beauty. In the sharp etching of each character—from Nala and Damayanti to even minor ones like Keshini, Kali and King Bhima—or in the step-by-step progression of the plot through carefully contrived situations of rich dramatic appeal, or in the absolute command over a multi-layered poetic language, *Nalacharitam* has few equals. Besides, the play is highly suited to the stage and has been a perennial source of delight to generations of theatre-lovers.

# I

The play is divided into four parts, each meant for a day's performance. The following scene from the first day presents Damayanti's encounter with the Swan, who plays the role of an emissary of love.

## *First Day : Scene 3*

### The Garden at Kundinam.

DAMAYANTI: Friends, would it not be more interesting  
to go to my father's court?  
Some people there would tell stories  
from various lands;  
it is a good way to while away one's time.

MAID: Honey-tongued one, when we were at home  
you insisted on our coming to this garden.  
Did we come here only to go back, moon-faced one?

Pray, tell us, jewel among damsels, with fluttering eyes!  
 Bhaimi, my friend, look,  
 it's very pleasant here now.

DAMAYANTI: To my ears the humming of bees is but scorching embers;  
 the songs of the cuckoo sharp spears;  
 the fragrance of flowers is an irritant to my nose;  
 Ah, this garden is unbearable today!

MAID: Look, is it a flash of lightning blazing down to the earth?  
 Or the moon's sphere approaching the terrestrial ground?  
 Is it a golden Swan flying towards us?  
 Isn't it like a stream of ambrosia to the eyes?

[While everyone looks on, the Swan touches the ground and draws near  
 Damayanti]

DAMAYANTI: It's so lovely — I have never seen or heard of anything like  
 this before:

[Moves nearer the Swan and attempts to catch him]  
 This Swan, with a golden hue and melodious voice, may get tame with me.

[Stretches both her hands to catch hold of the Swan, while he draws back a  
 little. To her friends:]

I would've touched him now, friends;  
 if only I could catch him, he'd be good for sport.  
 [Again she tries to catch the bird, but he moves away]  
 He's not cruel-hearted, but kind and graceful;  
 you keep away; I don't want any of you near me.

[Her friends depart. She tries again to catch the Swan, but fails]

*He trod slowly on, giving her the feeling  
 That, with one more step, she could catch him;  
 Hark, when Damayanti was separated from her friends.  
 The noble Swan spoke to her with a smile:*

SWAN: [To Bhaimi who still gazes at him with interest, though slightly disappointed at not being able to catch him]

Dear girl, diadem of lovely damsels,  
 what is your wish now?

How can you catch me, a sky-farer?  
 Even after youth has set in,  
 childishness has not waned in you.  
 Seeing such indiscreet behaviour,  
 the wise will laugh at you;  
 some will blame you, and you'll come to shame.  
 There's no need to capture me; I'm your friend:  
 you can trust me more than your maids.  
 You will secure a husband of your desire,  
 a ruler of the world  
 as handsome as the god of love.  
 I live in the kingdom of Nala, at the orders of Brahma,  
 to teach the comely maidens there graceful gait,  
 slow and elegant, stately and sensuous,  
 blended with charm—this is no jest.

[Damayanti, with admiration and wonder for the Swan, who was actually speaking to her]

DAMAYANTI: I saw you close by  
 and heard your light-hearted words.  
 Chariot to Lord Brahma,  
 your form is graceful, your banter diverting.  
 Have you really been sent by Brahma?  
 Is the city of Nishadha, the best of places?  
 Lovely, benevolent and noble bird,  
 hail to you; I bow to you indeed.  
 Noble chariot to Brahma, do recount  
 the virtues of King Nala;  
 your words relieve my pain; please  
 bless my ears with those auspicious words.  
 O noble, merciful one,  
 if you lend me your support,  
 helpless that I am,  
 I shall disclose to you today  
 my long-cherished dream.

[Saying so, she blushes and bows down her head, eager to listen to the bird's reply.]

*Having known half the mind of Bhaimi  
 The loveliest of all honey-tongued maidens,  
 The expert Swan spoke to her,  
 Trying to learn the other half too.*



SWAN: Speak out with confidence;  
 and reveal all your thoughts to me,  
 daughter of King Bhima!  
 Cast off your doubts, look upon me as one of your friends;  
 throwing away your shyness, speak without fear.  
 Crest-jewel of beautiful maidens,  
 crowning garland of fluttering-eyed damsels,  
 young lady, sister of Dama,  
 who is the man of your heart?  
 His birth-signs must be admirable, indeed!  
 Doe-eyed girl, do not hesitate,  
 do not hold back anything out of modesty.  
 I am here to assist you, lovely one,  
 will I ever cause you disgrace?  
 Take it that you have got your desire;  
 this word of mine is but the truth.

DAMAYANTI: King of swans, what can I tell you?  
 Can the hidden thoughts in the hearts  
 of high-born ladies be disclosed?  
 Fascinated by the reported virtues  
 of the acclaimed King Nala,  
 and thinking of his figure,  
 struck by the sharp arrows of the god of love,  
 and heaving deep sighs, I have become wan and distraught.

SWAN: For speaking out frankly, delicate maiden,  
 you will be blessed with good luck.  
 The good should be wedded to the good.  
 You have no one more suitable for a husband, for sure.  
 He is more valiant than the lord of the clouds;  
 he is handsome and virtuous, too.  
 Good lady, your union is the union of gold and diamond.  
 Vishnu for Lakshmi, the Moon for the Night,  
 Shiva for Parvati and Nala for you.

DAMAYANTI: This anguish, waxing day by day,  
 I haven't revealed even to my friends.  
 Do not delay, dear Swan, but go to the king,  
 and tell him everything, at the proper time.

SWAN: I'll tell the king about your desire  
 and he will be pleased with you.  
 Will you ever be drawn to another?

Then he will be furious with me.  
Your father might give you away to someone;  
you will also grow to be fond of him.  
All these words will be wasted, then,  
and I will cut a sorry figure;  
such mishaps might arise; so promptly  
give me an answer to this.

DAMAYANTI: Alas, dear Swan, why such a thought?  
Will I ever set my heart on another?  
Surely, the river joins only the sea;  
will the mountain ever prevent it?  
[Satisfied, the Swan bids farewell to Damayanti, who also leaves the scene.]

II

The following scene presents the evil spirit Kali's encounter with the gods, on their way back to heaven from Nala's marriage to Damayanti:

*Second Day : Scene 3*

On the Way to Heaven

*Nala and his bride, gripped by the consuming passion of love,  
Enjoyed themselves in the garden in the palace  
And in the quarters at the pond.  
Meanwhile the gods returning to heaven saw Kali on the way.  
He prostrated at their feet in a pompous manner.*  
[Enter Kali and Dwapara. The gods appear before them]

Kali (to Indra) : Where do you come from, King of the gods,  
accompanied by Agni, Yama and Varuna?

Indra: We are coming back from afar,  
but where are you going, Kali?

Kali: On the earth, there's a lovely lady,  
the lotus-eyed daughter of Bhima,  
the incarnation of beauty, it seems,  
and her name is Damayanti.  
I'm off to fetch her, my lord;  
please give me leave for that.

My army of Lust, Anger, Greed and Desire is with me;  
do not detain me further, King of the gods,  
lord of the world, benefactor of the worthy,  
and I'll return your favour.

Indra: Why do you try to build a dam  
after all the water has ebbed away?  
Her marriage is over.  
We are returning after attending it.  
The wedding was fascinating, indeed.  
She chose Nala, a handsome,  
virtuous, and youthful king.  
Now your journey to the earth is futile;  
an ill-omen has crossed your path.

Kali [with anger and irritation]:  
As you sat there gaping like dolls,  
with insatiable craving,  
did she, with a resolute, unwavering mind,  
choose a worm of a man, amidst the vast crowd?  
Your only gain seems to be the bother  
of walking up and down.  
But I am burning with rage at this.  
I'll make them quarrel, and separate them  
and turn them away from the kingdom. What a shame!  
This I swear with firm resolve.

Indra: Nala is humble and devoted to us,  
and it is our duty to protect our devotees.  
We have done our duty today,  
by uniting this couple.  
Kali, listen to our words for your own good;  
your enmity to Nala will be disastrous.  
Evil you are, but he is virtuous;  
you will come to grief.

[Indra and his friends depart while Kali watches them in anger and frustration.]

### *iii*

The scene that follows shows Damayanti, abandoned in the woods by Nala, meeting a woodsman.

*Second Day : Scene 8*

The Woods

*Weeping and mourning, searching around in the forest,  
Blinded by the enveloping darkness,  
The princess wandered about, wailing aloud in distress;  
“A woodsman happened to hear these piteous cries.*

[Later the woodsman appears in his hut as though suddenly awakened from sleep]

Woodsman [listening]: What's this hullabaloo

arising from the deep woods?

How can one know it from afar?

One has to go near and find out.

[looking out] But to venture into the dark woods all alone

and to snoop around there,

I'm quite afraid.

The sun-god is about to rise

to conquer the pervading darkness,

and I should be a coward

to sit here idle. This won't do.

Taking my bow, arrow and sword,

I'll go there and find out.

Let me shake off this sloth

and swiftly rise to the occasion.

Damayanti [Damayanti is heard weeping]:

Alas, my lord, ocean of kindness,

how could you go away, leaving me alone?

Falling into the gushing stream of stupor,

I'm now about to drown.

A python has grabbed my feet, my lord;

my mind is too dazed to act.

O reckless one, if you hear about my death,

remember me with love.

Woodsman [Listening]: From the sweetness of the voice,

sure enough, it's a girl.

Let me go to her now

and enquire who she is.

Through the branches, I can see  
 someone of incomparable beauty.  
 Whose separation makes her weep so?  
 How can I ensnare her?  
 She has natural grace and is blemishless.  
 Let me go near and find out.  
 She surpasses Rambha in charm.  
 Who is the one that can drink her lips?  
 Who could this divine maiden on earth be,  
 this embodiment of sweetness?

[Goes to Damayanti]

*iv*

The scene that follows is a continuation of the previous scene.

*Second Day : Scene 9*

[Damayanti appears with a python grabbing her foot.]

Damayanti: Luck was lost in the game of dice;  
 the mind got dazed in the thick forest.  
 Noble lord, kindness incarnate,  
 has love for your beloved dried up in your mind?

Woodsman [Suddenly appearing]: Lady, who came to the forest  
 with no friend, or son,  
 and fell into a deep pit of misery,  
 aren't you fit to lead your life  
 always in jolly merriment, wench?  
 Don't be shy, I am a man  
 who dwells in this forest.  
 Even if you wail so, will anyone else  
 come here to save you?  
 Lean on my shoulders, lovely girl!  
 Let me kill the snake,  
 When life is in danger, even those of the highest caste  
 need not worry about touching others.  
 Fairest of wenches,  
 the snake has been killed.

[Kills the snake, keeps watching Damayanti's face intently. She senses it.]

Damayanti: When the python caught me, I fainted,  
and my body quaked with fear;  
I've been saved by you, kind-hearted you are,  
now you can go away wherever you please.  
There's no reward for saving one's life,  
except divine blessings. Good luck!

Woodsman [With disappointment at these unexpected words]:

Lady, how can I now go away, thus?  
I have so many dreams.  
You listen to them all.  
Whatever be my will,  
You accept it.  
I am aggrieved, you must have pity on me;  
comely wench, why do you behave thus?  
Great virtues throng, thrive  
and bloom in you in full splendour  
and spread their fame; but if unappreciated,  
they will be of no consequence.  
The god of love is tormenting me.  
In so many ways he shoots his arrows to vanquish me.  
Your body should not lose its complexion  
by wandering here and there.  
If one doubts, how can he enjoy pleasures?  
My eyes and heart are fixed on you.  
Tell me, where else can you go now?  
You'll live here in comfort, lady.  
I have a house, with strong walls  
and a roof that does not leak.  
We'll live there;  
whoever has known the pleasure of forest life?  
Hasn't this been sought by the kings in old age?  
Don't you know that? Don't you like it?  
Make up your mind; what else should be said now?

Damayanti: My god, King of Nishadha,  
what can be more incredible than this?  
Lord, you disappeared, discarding your kingdom.  
Not finding you, I set out to seek you;  
I was caught by a snake, but did not die there.  
In the wilderness, the woodsman drew up blabbering nonsense.  
What should I say to keep at bay, irrational that he is?  
Even so, is he going to listen to it?  
I have a boon from the king of the gods:

“Lady, whoever tries to violate your chastity  
shall be burnt to ashes”,  
I shall turn it to use now.  
[The woodsman is burnt to ashes, while Damayanti looks on in wonder.  
Later she departs, paying obeisance to Indra and other gods.]

## V

In the following scene, Nala and Damayanti, after long years of separation and agony, are reunited. When the scene opens Nala appears disguised as Rituparna's charioteer Bahuka.

*Fourth Day : Scene 7*

## Women's Quarters

[Damayanti appears sitting, and Bahuka enters]

Damayanti [Gets up, looks at him intently, with tearful eyes]:

Have you seen anywhere that exalted one,  
who is just like you?  
Not being able to know his whereabouts,  
deeply engulfed am I in burning embers,  
and utterly exhausted and spent.

Bahuka: Overwhelmed with rapturous delight am I now,  
though stricken with misfortune earlier.  
Those who devoutly worship Shiva never come to any harm;  
though enlightened,  
I came under the spell of that vile Kali,  
who entered my being.  
Losing my kingdom and wealth, I took refuge in the forest,  
and then settled in Kosala, the land of the solar race,  
blessed by the gods pleased with sacrifices.  
Under your curse, Kali left me, unable to hold on;  
and I have come to you, darling.  
Now only death can separate us;  
enough of this intense agony.  
Happy days are ahead; by the grace of God,  
my mind is clear now; no more fear.  
Damayanti [Sobbing]: My heart full of love and devotion  
for you, handsome lord,

I have been pining for you as the dark night dotes on the moon.  
Do not be indifferent to me anymore through this disguise.  
Will I ever be separated from you again even for a moment?  
I sent several brahmins to villages, cities and forests,  
to search for you, incarnate beauty.  
I wept a lot, but to whom shall I tell all this?

*Judging by his gesture, speech and age he is the  
King of Nishadha himself,  
But where is his body, the seat of magnificent radiance?  
While Damayanti was lost in such thoughts, the King,  
Wearing the cloth given by the serpent king  
Assumed his own form, and with a rising temper,  
Spoke these bitter words to his wife:*

Nala: [Seeing Nala in his own form, Damayanti approaches him with joy and wonder, but he pretends to be angry]:

Losing my right senses,  
I committed several offences towards you;  
but the consorts of kings should not have rancour  
nor should they resort to deception;  
or, perhaps, it is not improper,  
and so let it be.

But, my darling wife, beautiful one,  
what you're upto now is "proper" indeed,  
ruthless woman, this attempt of yours  
to invite many kings to this place  
and select another husband!

King Rituparna is here in response to your words.

Damayanti: Long back, hearing about your virtues,  
my mind was drawn to you.

Then the Swan came and sang your praises.

Listening to that, my heart was set on you for ever.

Indra, Agni, Yama and Varuna courted me and begged for my hand,  
but nothing could change my resolve.

King of kings, without hiding my love,  
before the august gathering,

I chose you as my husband, garlanding you.

This attempt of mine today is for the same purpose.

Where have you been, lord of love and valour?

Who was there to help me?

Nala: Your being in love with me does not ensure your virtue.



After all, who is not adept at finding fault with another?  
 Who can ever know what perfidies are concealed in the hearts of women?  
 I understand your intentions;  
 now let me tell you what's good for you,  
 Rituparna is a suitable husband for you,  
 set your heart on him,  
 he is noble and illustrious,  
 and is passionately in love with you,  
 He is adept in the sports of love and war;  
 accept him now.

Damayanti: Does it matter, my lord,  
 that frightened and unable to seek you out,  
 I adopted such a course?  
 My mother is my witness; if I am still thought guilty,  
 I have no regrets; I am happy, indeed.  
 There is no falsehood here  
 except what I have done in my eagerness  
 to see you, this incarnation of the god of love,  
 My father does not know this;  
 but have faith in me and accept me now.  
 What I have told to your face is the truth.

[Saying this, she falls at Nala's feet; Nala is lost in thought.]

*His beloved, overcome with happiness at the sight of her husband,  
 Knelt before him and said these words;  
 Nala, eager to avoid even the slightest blemish,  
 Which may ensue from the union with a harlot,  
 Stood there confused and bewildered,  
 When he heard a voice echoing from the sky:*

"Nala, listen, I'm the god of wind, the guardian of spirits;  
 Saintly king, your queen is undefiled and virtuous;  
 Discard your doubts, the rumour about the second marriage  
 Was merely a stratagem to bring you here."

[Nala looks at the sky in wonder.]

"Heed these words of the god of wind,  
 Who is the essence of all the three worlds.  
 Hail to you! May you live long!"

*With these words, the heavenly beings showered flowers,  
 And divine drums resounded on the earth;  
 Watching these wondrous happenings*

*The king of Nishadha embraced Damayanti and the children,  
And accompanied by all of them, went to king Bhima.*

From *Nalacharitam*, 17th-18th century

Tr. by T. N. Sudha

## Selections

ARNOS PADIRI

FR. JOHN ERNESTUS HANXIEDEN (1681-1732), popularly known as Arnos Padiri in Malayalam, was one among the notable Christian missionaries who had made yeoman contribution to the development of Malayalam language and literature. He was born in Germany in 1681 and at the age of 19 he joined the Jesuit order and came to Kerala to work as a priest in its Indian mission. He learnt Malayalam and Sanskrit from scholars at Trichur and devoted most of his time to intellectual pursuits. His works fall into two categories—one concerned with language studies and the other poetical works. He has compiled two dictionaries, Malayalam-Sanskrit and Malayalam-Portuguese, and two grammatical works. All his poetical works, numbering about half a dozen, deal with Biblical themes. He died at Pazhur in 1732.

### 1

## The New Song

*Puthen Pana* (Putten Pāna), also known as *Koothasa Pana* and *Mishihacharitam* is considered to be his masterpiece and has won wide acclaim from Christian devotees. In 14 cantos he summarises both the old and the new testaments in simple language, in the mellifluous Malayalam metre *Pana*.

The extract given below is from the 12th canto where Virgin Mary laments over the crucifixion of her son.

In your goodness, intently hear,  
The unmixed sorrows of Mother Virgin Mary.  
Words can hardly recount  
All her griefs, nor has the mind  
The power to ponder over it.  
And if in my own small way I make a try,  
It won't be met,  
Yet, with Mother Virgin's grace,  
I shall narrate a little.

After the Lord of all, the Messiah,  
In ransom has given his life,  
Seeing how her son,

The reservoir of all virtues, suffered,  
With immense pain filled,  
At him did she gaze.  
Her heart was struck,  
Hit as though by spear, arrow or bullet,  
Her limbs, her hands, her feet  
seemed paralysed.  
With her thoughts ablaze  
And tears trickling down her cheeks,  
She found it hard to express her grief.  
Yet, keeping in mind  
The words of our Lord eternal,  
And setting her thoughts firm  
Her lamentation did she begin:  
"My son, the unblemished,  
Virtue incarnate,  
Didn't you free all mankind  
From the burden of original sin?  
O my son!  
Wasn't it to discharge the debts  
Incurred by our forefathers in the past  
That God as you are,  
You were born as Son of Man,  
O my son!  
Mankind born to Adam  
And his progeny  
Sinned without qualms of conscience,  
For that didn't you atone?  
O my son!

It is good that you accomplished  
The redemption of man.  
Yet why was it ordained  
That I should see it?  
O my son!  
If I had died earlier,  
If only you had done this—thereafter  
But alas, before my own eyes  
Did you not give up life?  
O my son!  
Having foretold all this,  
Having bidden farewell to me,

For the sake of man,  
 Didn't you immolate your body?  
 O my son!  
     Did you not cry,  
     And ask of God, the Father,  
     To have the goodwill  
     To show clemency to mankind?  
 O my son!

Laden with thoughts, you prayed,  
 Your thoughts burning,  
 Were you not soaked  
 In the blood you sweated?  
 O my son!

Gazing upon heaven, you  
 Shed blood from your eyes.  
 Even the earth  
 You covered with your blood,  
 O my son!  
     For long, this earth of ours  
     Was fretting because of sin;  
     But with your blood,  
     You have released it from its curse,  
 O my son!

Did you not in this way,  
 Suffering acute agony,  
 Try to bring grace  
 To all mankind?  
 O my son!  
     The wicked besieged you  
     To force you to do this;  
     But that helped you to make a gift  
     Of its wages for the benefit of man,  
 O my son!

And when the traitor  
 At the opportune moment  
 Betrayed you with a kiss noble one,  
 Didn't the wicked seize you?  
 O my son!  
     The knave you fostered so long,  
     The same fellow  
     Did sell you

To your enemies,  
O my son!  
Such a lust for pelf  
If the fellow had,  
By alms we would have made the money;  
But he deceived us all.  
O my son!  
They seized you  
As though you were a thief;  
Ruthlessly did they bind your hands  
And thrash you, unabashed.  
O my son!  
And then in the presence of Hannas  
Didn't a wretched knave  
Slap you  
On your face?  
O my son!  
And then did they  
Take you before Caiphas?  
Didn't they slight you,  
And didn't they condemn you?  
O my son!  
Didn't the meanest of the mean  
Caiphas  
Condemn you  
The lord of all creatures, all sustenance?  
O my son!  
Didn't that gang of your enemies  
Hand you over to the hangmen  
Without  
Proper evidence?  
O my son!  
And then  
They took you to Herod  
And sent you back  
Inflicting insult on you,  
O my son!  
They took you  
To the Procurator;  
They mocked at you,  
Accused you of crime,  
O my son!

To them  
 No injury you have done.  
 Why so much wrath  
 Upon you?  
 O my son!  
     Without considering  
     You as sentient,  
     They bound you to a column  
     And whipped you,  
     O my son!  
 By turn they thrashed you,  
 Your body was covered with slices of your own flesh.  
 It was broken  
 And you wore down,  
 O my son!  
     With inveterate hatred, the Jews  
     Thrust the crown of thorns upon your head,  
     With my mind confounded, what shall I say  
     Of your head abraded, drenched in blood?  
     O my son!  
 The cruel wounds  
 Like a panther has torn away your skin,  
 From head to foot  
 You look lynched,  
 O my son!  
     How is it  
     That the thirst for your blood,  
     Grew  
     So wild in them?  
     O my son!  
 They spat at your face,  
 Mockingly bowed to you, humiliated you.  
 Ill-treated you,  
 None would do it  
 Even to a quadruped,  
 O my son!  
     Insults, mockery,  
     Charges derogatory,  
     And abuses,  
     They poured upon you,  
     O my son!

By force  
They made my delicate one  
Bear a heavy cross  
And walk  
O my son!

They beat you, pinched you, pushed you from behind.  
They kicked you, felled you, and dragged you,  
They caused you great misery.  
They wore you down,

O my son!

As dogs tear at the gaping wounds  
Of a carcass,  
They poked at your wounds  
And lacerated them,  
O my son!

This shall move  
Even the hearts of the wicked  
And these culprits,  
How can they get mercy?

O my son!

What have you done  
That they should do such outrages upon you?  
Haven't you done for them  
Endless deeds of kindness?

O my son!

The most heinous crimes  
These evil men have done;  
Out of boundless kindness,  
You have forgiven them,

O my son!

For the forgiveness of sin  
Of mankind on earth,  
Did you not bear and suffer  
More than the earth?

O my son!

Having inflicted punitive pain on you,  
Having exposed you to contempt,  
Didn't they make you walk  
Along the streets of Jerusalem?

O my son!

Worn down, you stumbled, you fell,  
you got up, bore the heavy cross

And reached  
 The mount of crucifixion  
 O my son!  
     Did they not strip away  
     From your body  
     The robe of yours  
     Soaked in your blood?  
     O my son!  
 Over the head of father Adam  
 On the tree,  
 Supreme Lord,  
 Were you not crucified?  
 O my son!  
     As you hung on nails  
     With your nerves overstretched,  
     Did you not suffer  
     Acute death-pangs?  
     O my son!  
 The body of the Lord  
 Nails did pierce,  
 How ignominious it was,  
 In truth!  
 O my son!  
     Not a trace of kindness  
     For my son,  
     These enemies  
     Do have in their hearts!  
     O my son!  
 The very same doyens,  
 Didn't the previous Sunday  
 To you  
 Pay obeisance?  
 O my son!  
     They were with you,  
     They sang hymns in praise  
     They did adore you,  
     And did worship you,  
     O my son!  
 Thereafter  
 What crimes did you commit  
 That on you  
 They should do this outrage?  
 O my son!



Winning and lovely  
Is your face,  
How dare these sinister men  
Do this to you!  
O my son!  
The grace of your face,  
The grace of your physique,  
Is a delight to the eyes;  
It gives sheer bliss  
O my son!  
Your body  
pleasing to the eye, they hacked  
And tilled  
As one would till the earth,  
O my son!  
Blind to goodness these ruffians  
Taking you to task, made ulcers in your body;  
From head to foot, they ripped you.  
Aren't you worn down?  
O my son!  
That thrust with the spear  
On your breast,  
Ripped open  
My heart,  
O my son!  
Every one dies,  
But with your death,  
You did erase  
The very shame of death.  
O my son!  
The sun fled;  
There was darkness at noon,  
Was it out of fear  
Of your death, —  
You, the valiant one?  
O my son!  
There was sorrow added to sorrow  
Many who lay buried.  
Lord of the earth,  
Came out of their graves,  
O my son!  
Even the dead, out of sorrow  
Moved out, And yet

Why didn't those alive  
 Have no grief?  
 O my son!  
 Even rocks and trees  
 Burst out in sorrow;  
 The grief then felt  
 Went beyond words.  
 O my son!  
 Yet the Jews were not moved,  
 Their hearts  
 Were harder  
 Than even rocks,  
 O my son!  
 As you, lord of all, breathed your last,  
 The grief was total, immense, universal,  
 I fell into a sea of sorrow, and sank.  
 Ah, of my sorrows what can I say?  
 O my son!  
 If you could help me die  
 Even as you died,  
 All this sorrow  
 Would have lost its edge,  
 O my son!  
 Yet, I am determined,  
 To abide by your will  
 I am not in the least afraid,  
 My pure one,  
 O my son!  
 The enemies are not without spite,  
 But you live  
 A state of mind  
 Without hate,  
 O my son!  
 You made the blood of your feet,  
 Flow upon Adam's head;  
 And thus you wiped out  
 The sin caused by Satan's deceit,  
 O my son!  
 To dispel the evil  
 caused by a tree  
 You hung on a tree  
 And died.  
 O my son!  
 The curse caused by a woman  
 Eating the fruit of the forbidden tree,

You have lifted  
Through the fruit of another woman.  
O my son!

Because you wanted to hold us  
Close to your heart,  
You opened your heart  
For man.

O my son!  
Your loyalty untainted  
To declare-  
Did you not open  
Out your heart to all?

O my son!  
The prime lord that you are,  
The gate of paradise sealed by sin  
You opened,  
And cleared the path to salvation,  
O my son!

Was it that after having cleared the earliest debt  
You earned more  
To clear future debts?

O my son!  
You put all your wealth  
Within the church,  
At a place  
Safe from the ravages of thieves,  
O my son!

And you did  
Depute the financier of churches  
To reimburse those  
Who were in dire need;  
O my son!

This way you brought grace  
To mankind  
Containing within you  
The growing grief.  
O my son!"

O Mother Virgin, I bow and entreat,  
Singing of your sorrows,  
Dispel the grief in me, blazen my mind,  
Kindly wash my sin in the blood of your Son,  
And cleanse my heart, immaculate Mother,

Through the death of your Son, help me, Mother Pure,  
 Forestall the death of my soul;  
 May I be taken to the feet of your Son!  
 Let it come to be, by the grace of  
 The Mother of Jesus: My Lord!

From *Puthan Pana*, 17th-18th century

Tr. by K. M. Tharakan

2

Thoughts of a Dying Person

*Chathuranthyam* (Caturantnyam) is another work written by Arnos Padiri, which was also very popular among the Christian laity. It is divided into four cantos: *Marana Parvam*, *Vidhi Parvam*, *Naraka Parvam* and *Moksha Parvam*, which together describe the four stages through which the soul of the man passes at the end of life's journey.

The following extract from *Marana Parvam* reveals the pangs of separation experienced by the departing soul at the twilight hour between life and death.

O sun, who causes light and radiance,  
 Lord of the day, light of the earth.  
 Who has been rising and shining for me so long,  
 You, master of planets, dispelled darkness.  
 Now, as you set, are you setting for ever,  
 O jewel of light, source of radiance?  
 Hereafter, I don't have the good fortune  
 To rejoice in the sight of your bright rays.  
 And you, moonlight that quenches the thirst  
 Caused to the earth by the heat of the Sun,  
 You, shaped of humours in a rhythmic pattern,  
 You wax, and you wane; all through the year  
 You revolve round the earth; twelve paths you take;  
 You make months as the sun makes the year.  
 You sustain the sea; alas, in the days to come,  
 I cannot gain light for my eyes to watch you with rays so cool;  
 O you moon, your light I have lost for ever,  
 I have no more the good fortune to count on you  
 As my days on earth are too soon over.  
 And you, planets who give your names to the days of the week,  
 You who have your distinct glory, and might,  
 In your several orbits, in grace you move,  
 And I have known days of the week after you.  
 I have finished the number of my days on earth,

I have reached the end of my life in this world.  
 O you stars, you shine in the sky like jewels on the crown  
 In your light, won't darkness and night disappear?  
 You flock of birds in the sky, you songsters,  
 For a long time I have delighted in your melodies.  
 Alas! it was a feast to my eyes, a blessing  
 To watch you, you creatures, many-coloured.  
 You comfort me in my deep distress;  
 You take away my anxiety in peril;  
 But now in the throes of my death,  
 You have no device to offer me relief.  
 In times of sorrow, it embalms the heart  
 To have companions to share our grief.  
 You birds, sing of my demise in anguish.  
 Crows and peacocks, sing of my misery;  
 Declare to the world the terror that death inspires.  
 Learn that your turn will come, and tremble!

O you wild animals, lion and the like,  
 And domestic animals, cow, horses, and camels,  
 You have been of service to me, in your own ways,  
 You offered me food, drink, medicine, butter-milk and milk.  
 You see these travails of mine; my life  
 You cannot save, bring me at least some relief.  
 In order to overcome grief, fly into the forest,  
 Densely dark, unvisited by the sun.  
 Mountains, besides which clouds do float,  
 Forests enriched with trees, adorned with jewels of leaves,  
 The coolness you exude does not refresh me.  
 Ah, at this time even sandalwood and herbs are of no avail.  
 All items of food, grain, fruit, vegetables,  
 Have grown distasteful to me.  
 As I recapitulate the relish they gave me  
 In the past, its present loss makes me sad.

The running of the hound in hunt,  
 The cry of animals stricken with fear,  
 The din of the hunt raised by hunters,  
 The freshness of the greenery of trees:  
 All those joys are over like a dream.  
 What remains with me is but sorrow.  
 The feelings that the chased animals experienced,  
 I do now experience.

The ornaments of the earth, the earthly stars,  
 O wild flowers of the woods,  
 As the stars shine in the sky  
 You do shine in the forest.  
 Inhaling the fragrance of flowers  
 Much delight have I derived.  
 But never did I, sinner as I am, imagine  
 That my life was also short like that of a flower.  
 However delectable the flower be,  
 It will lose its grace and fade away.  
 I have often nipped the flowers without mercy.  
 What I have done to them is being done to me.

Just as a garland-weaver plucks flowers,  
 So does death pluck the lives of men.  
 I have reached the eve of my life.  
 The faded flower of my life may drop now.

Ah, it is of no use that I narrate all these  
 To objects that have no life of their own.  
 But I wish those, who were my comrades  
 In this life, know of all my woes.  
 I will narrate the sorrows of my heart  
 O my sincere friends, the time has come  
 To part company for ever and ever;  
 Seeing my anguish, and hearing of my sorrows,  
 Only you are there to commiserate.  
 Will I be able to recover the days.  
 That I have whiled away for sheer fun  
 As I think of the days I have lost?  
 I believe the days to come are more joyous.  
 Yet the dread of what the future holds for me  
 Makes the present miserable for me.

O you, who were my pals in my merriment,  
 Will you desert me in my distress?  
 When you are affluent, friends  
 Abound; in peril they leave you in the lurch.  
 All those, I have helped, have deserted me,  
 Now, there is none beside me to give me comfort,  
 And you who haven't deserted me yet  
 I bid you farewell, I take leave of you.

I haven't any more time to play with you.  
 Fate has forbidden it, no more play.  
 It gives me great grief to part from you;  
 But we all have to go, and I too will go,  
 Even if I hesitate, die I must.  
 I know not what comes to me after death.  
 Shall I be saved, or shall I be doomed?  
 Into a state of uncertainty I am thrown.  
 I didn't realize that I was but a traveller;  
 And I hankered after earthly pleasures.  
 Darkness has settled in my heart.  
 If only I had lived in full knowledge of my death!  
 Now I have wound up my work in this world.  
 And I have set out on a journey, I am about to die.  
 I have walked long enough; I shall now stop;  
 My ship has reached its harbour.  
 No, it hasn't yet; it was just my imagining.  
 In fact this sea inspires fear; it is vast and deep  
 And is fraught with immense peril.  
 Though the sea becomes rough, and the waves unruly,  
 I have to cross it for certain;  
 Because I have done unbecoming acts,  
 I have to take perilous path.  
 There is nobody who has taken this path.  
 No experienced one to guide me on my way.  
 If I lose my way, I have no companion  
 To show me the right path at the right time.  
 The agony that such thoughts arouse in the mind  
 Is great; so also the consternations I feel.  
 Those, who have seen my valiant acts  
 In the past, see my plight at present.  
 Earlier I revelled in my pranks; I laughed;  
 But now I am weakened; I am sad.  
 Those who have seen my bravado in the past  
 Shall witness my miserable plight and take fright.  
 O friends, see for yourselves and realize  
 How the pleasures of the world meet their end.

## The Story of Kuchela

RAMAPURATHU VARIER

RAMPURATHU VARIER (Rāmapurattu Vārier, 1702-'52) belonged to Ramapuram village in Kottayam District. The poet's name was Shankaran; Parvati Varasyar was his mother and Padmanabhan Nampoori his father. Shankaran had his higher studies in Sanskrit at Irinjalakuda under the scholar-poet Unnayi Varier. In 1749 when the Maharaja of Travancore, Martanda Varma, visited the nearby Vaikom temple, Varier was introduced to him by the local ruler Ravi Varma. Martanda Varma felt pleased with the poem presented to him by Varier and made him a member of his retinue on his return journey in a country-boat. It was during this journey that Varier composed the narrative poem *Kuchelavṛttam* (Kucelavṛttam, the Story of Sudama) and recited it on the way.

The other works of Varier include a commentary (in Sanskrit) on *Amarakosha* and two narrative poems, *Nalacharitam* and *Iravanavadham*. The musical quality of *Nalacharitam* has made it popular as a choral song by women in their performance called *Kaikottikali*. *Iravanavadham* is in the style of a *tullal*, an oral narrative poem intended for stage-performance as propounded by Kunchan Nambiar of the same century. While at Thiruvananthapuram the Maharaja entrusted him with the work of translating *Gita-Govinda*, the 12th century Sanskrit composition, sung in Kerala temples as part of daily ritual.

*Kuchelavṛttam*, his most important work, is marked by a pervading emotional tone, unusual in the neo-classic age. Its simple diction reminds us that it was written for people to sing. An almost total elimination of conventional devices makes the poet's voice distinct and refreshing. It is based on the Bhagavata episode of Sudama or Kuchela, the childhood friend and classmate of Shri Krishna. They leave the Gurukula of Sandeepan, and the pious Sudama later happens to pass through hard days. He and his wife take to begging in order to eke out a living. One day his wife suggests that he should visit Lord Krishna, lord of all the worlds, so that their misery could be redressed. Hesitant at first, Sudama agrees to visit his childhood friend. The poet describes this journey, the dramatic meeting of the two friends at Krishna's capital Dwaraka and the subsequent redemption of the devotee. How the poem came to be written is narrated by the poet in the prologue. He did it at the bidding of Martanda Varma, a great scholar and a greater patron.

I bow before him, let my song  
please him the most

Like the beaten rice that Sudama gave to Lord Krishna.

The rhythm of the poem keeps close to the slow movement of the country-boat through the wavy backwaters, with each beat coinciding with a stroke of the oar. The couplets, with sixteen syllables in the first line and thirteen in the second, are flexible, and allow for variations by using long and short syllables. First sung in the country-boat, the poem is termed a "vanchippattu"



(boat-song), and *Kuchelavṛttam* is not only the most popular among the vanchippattu series composed in Malayalam but has earned the position of an outstanding poem of the 18th century. The following excerpt describes Sudama's journey to Dwaraka and his meeting with Krishna:

“And so be it, dear, it is midnight,  
 Let me sleep a while and I shall go early morn  
 To see the Lord of fourteen worlds, omnipresent,  
 Give me some choice gift for Him;  
 Lord of the three domains is He,  
 None shall go empty-handed to see His Majesty.  
 One can offer an elephant  
 Or maybe a simple florid leaf  
 Some rice-flakes, a few flowers, or fruit,  
 Corn roasted, for anything will suit  
 Him, the beloved of the Lotus-Maid,  
 Do not be worried, do not look aghast,  
 Dear one, you may get ready any one of these.”

When she heard her husband's words  
 Grains she got as alms, the lady sacred,  
 Hastily pounded well, at night  
 Dark it was and with pebbles and husk unground  
 Bound in cloth and made into a pouch.  
 Ready to go after his bath early morn,  
 Was the pious one, her husband.  
 She bowed and touched his feet for blessings  
 Gave the pouch to him.

In a spirit of pervassive excitement  
 Palm-leaf umbrella held in hand,  
 Farewell he bids to his inspiring wife  
 And under the morning sun about to turn bright  
 Prayed Sudama, muttered the myriad names of Krishna.  
 To the right of his path he heard  
 Shrill notes of crow-pheasants—  
 A good omen—his journey commenced.

Hour after hour, swayed by his swelling love for the Lord,  
 Immersed in that blissful sea  
 Plunging here and rising elsewhere,  
 Thus without wasting time, did he float along.  
 Village after village, town after town  
 Restless he journeyed, the noble-minded scholar.  
 Unmeasurable is the depth of Ramanuja's heart.

Thus mused he in rapture, old Sudama:  
 "What will He feel, He whom  
 I have not seen for years?  
 After putting off my visit day after day,  
 When I see Him today, so late  
 What will He think, the lotus-eyed Lord?  
 Will He be unmoved as a stout wild palm  
 Unconcerned by my love's  
 Soft-as-flower arrows?  
 Unseen ever since we departed  
 Offering presents to our Guru,  
 He may long to see me now,  
 The Lord of the Yadavas that He is,  
 He may seek no reason to redress my penury  
 He is eternal — the worldly bonds,  
 Companionship and complaints thereon  
 Are to Him of no consequence.  
 He shall not turn down my request  
 As Drupada did that of Drona,  
 For He is the prime source, and not a worldly lord.  
 I may not measure upto Arjuna,  
 Compared to Kubja I may be light-weight,  
 Yet respectable am I owing to my worth;  
 And He is the Lord of all pious ones,  
 Friend of the deprived.  
 Krishna would be merciful  
 And is bound to bless a Sadhu Brahmin,  
 Ignorant or simple he may be.  
 Likely it is, the red-lotus-eyed  
 Lord will gladly welcome me  
 And treat me well indeed."  
 Thus was Sudama moved by doubt and hesitation,  
 All the while his mind fixed on the Lord  
 Blue as the firmament.

Unmatched in devotion among the blessed of the earth,  
 Sudama saw the golden city Dwaravati.  
 "Not in this world, not in all the three worlds  
 Is there a city to equal this  
 It seems to me to be Vaikunta,  
 the seat of Lord Vishnu,  
 Vaikunta itself, along with Vasudeva  
 And the Lord Absolute  
 Came down to the western sea

On top of a golden island  
 Shining like ornament divine  
 And excelling Indra's capital, Amravati,  
 Standing still, that stillness I recall.

The holy town towered so high  
 Conquered the skies and for an infinite length of time  
 Remained atop Bhogapuri, the abode of Ananta,  
 From where at the end, along with the Lord Himself  
 The city itself vanished.

There is a golden outer fort,  
 High enough to embrace the sky around  
 Diamond-studded is the interior courtyard  
 Shedding lustre throughout.  
 Everywhere a visitor sees  
 His own image, clear and vivid.  
 Numberless are the domes and fortresses  
 I can only describe the Lord's abode as I have seen  
 Reflected in my mind's mirror.

Four towers along each of the turrets  
 And each of these with decorated gateways:  
 Broadways lie graceful in all four directions  
 Profuse is the glance of Goddess Lakshmi  
 On each market and shop on either side.  
 Wealth immense and crops in plenty—  
 No space left in any granary;  
 For gold and pearls the space is too small.  
 Indira himself in sixteen thousand and eight forms  
 Seems to occupy each bower.

Even the thousand-tongued *Ananta* cannot count  
 The mansions of the children of *Nandagopa's* son.  
 Pradyumna, Aniruddha, several others  
 Occupy mansions that shed  
 The lustre of millions of stars.

The house of that wine-lover, the elder brother of Madhava,  
 And this dwelling of scholar-saint Uddhava,  
 Countless houses of Yadava groups,  
 Satyaki and Kritavarma among their heroes.  
 Figures in thousands return ashamed  
 Unable to count them all.

No place lies vacant in the city of the Absolute  
 And no house here is devoid of gold.

Gardens immaculate and ponds everywhere

Entertainment halls and sporting gardens,  
 All are in plenty and for all.  
 The Lord of the universe, He is mightier than His elder brother,  
 Many are those who come to see Him  
 And there are mothers and maids,  
 Elephants and horses too —  
 Space is too small to accommodate all.  
 Hunger-shrunk scholar as he is  
 At the sight of Kusasthali town  
 Sudama turned bereft of wants, of hunger and thirst,  
 More than that his worldly desires purged.  
 His attire of rapture gifted by Ramanuja's abode  
 Became a wet garment, while he immersed  
 Himself in tears of infinite joy.  
 Heavy it was for one habitually ill-clad.  
 A torrent of love lifted and carried him swiftly,  
 Let him through the ocean of good fortune  
 Changing hands at every turn till he found himself  
 O! at the very doorstep of Sarngi, Lord Krishna!  
 He heard the bustling joy of throbbing crowd around,  
 Which enfeebled the roaring seas mingling at deluge.  
 He saw the sculptured marvels several on both sides  
 While the Lord's friend blessed the main path with his approach  
 Atop the seven-floored palace, with the daughter of ocean beside,  
 The Lord of the fourteen worlds saw His companion down below.  
 Pathetic to see, wrapped in tattered clothes,  
 With a long-cloth on his shoulder,  
 Enwrapped pouch and holy book  
 Both held tight under his arms,  
 Wearing holy ashes,  
 Bearing on his forehead the callus-mark of daily prostration,  
 Carrying his rattling tattered palm-umbrella,  
 Ever chanting the names of the Lord with a string of beads,  
 His mind fixed on the omnipotent form  
 He came, rapt in bliss.  
 Shouri was all in tears at this sight.  
 What was it that made him weep?  
 Joy to behold the Brahmin friend  
 Or pity for his lamentable plight?  
 Has He ever wept — the bold one, the lotus-eyed Lord?

## Eight Poems

KUNCHAN NAMBIAR

KUNCHAN NAMBIAR (Kuncan Nambiyār, 1700-1770) is second only to Thunchath Ezhuthacchan in the hierarchy of Malayalam poets. Nambiar is a caste name. The Nambiaris form one of the twelve intermediate castes entrusted with the duty of assisting Brahmins in various ways in temple services. Kunchan belonged to a sub-sect specialising in the temple arts. This sub-sect helps another small community, the Chakiars, in performing *Koothu*, a stylized kind of dramatic narration of episodes from puranic mythology, spiced with impromptu satirical comments on contemporary events and individuals.

Little is known of the details of the poet's life. All we can do is to make out an outline, mainly from the invocatory and dedicatory sections at the opening of his works and the numerous legends associated with his name. He was born in the hamlet of Killikkurishshimangalam, a few kilometres to the west of Palakkad in central Kerala. Early in life he moved to the south and probably spent a few years in places around Kottayam and finally settled down at Ambalappuzha. Kerala was in those days divided into petty principalities, and Ambalappuzha was the seat of the prince of Chempakasseri, whose court he belonged to. Nambiar must have stayed there for some twenty years. When Martanda Varma, the ruler of Travancore, annexed Chempakasseri in 1746, the poet shifted to Thiruvananthapuram, the capital of Travancore, where he enjoyed the patronage of Martanda Varma and his successor Rama Varma. According to a legend, he returned in his old age to Ambalappuzha and died there.

Kunchan Nambiar's name is inseparably connected with the art form, *thullal*. It is a kind of simple solo dance in which the dancer recites a story-poem with appropriate gestures and movements. He has his special make-up and costume and is assisted by two instrumentalists. In popular belief Kunchan Nambiar is the originator of this art form. *Thullal* may have been in existence even before Nambiar's time, but it was perhaps his genius that improved and perfected it. It is a fine blending of poetry and dancing. There are three types of *thullal* depending on the speed of the rhythm or movement—*ottan* being the fastest, *parayan* the slowest and *shithankan* coming in between the two. It is believed that Nambiar did not actually perform, but only wrote the poems and directed the performance.

The Nambiar canon consists of some forty to fifty *thullals*, in addition to a dozen other poetical works. Among these other poetical works there are minor classics like *Shrikrishnacharitam*, but Nambiar is at his best in the *thullals*. The *thullals* are remarkable for the poet's narrative skill, descriptive power, sense of rhythm, verbal magic, mastery of conversational style and, above all, his abundant sense of humour. The plots are taken from the myths but he portrays everything in terms of conversational style and, above all, with his abundant sense of humour.

He portrays everything in terms of contemporary life in Kerala and in an idiom marked by a rich admixture of colloquial speech. His tone is predominantly humorous; he pokes fun at a variety of individual foibles and satirises many a social evil without fear or favour. His is the comic muse par excellence and his humour ranges from sheer fun to bitter sarcasm.

### The Progress to the Palace

*Sabhapravesham* (Sabhāpravēśam) is one of Nambiar's famous *Parayan Thullals*. It tells the story of Duryodhana's discomfiture on his visit to Indraprastha, the abode of the Pandavas. Maya, the chief architect of the asuras, builds for the Pandavas a great palace which is in many ways a miracle. Hearing about it from travellers who pass through the city of Hastinapura, Duryodhana, who is filled with envy and curiosity, decides to visit it without notice. He goes there with all his brothers, relatives, advisers and friends, besides a large retinue. The royal progress is intended to show off his power and glory. But once he enters the palace, he makes a fool of himself because in this wonderland he cannot distinguish between illusory land and water, and vice versa. Seeing this, the Pandavas and Draupadi laugh at him to their heart's content.

The following passage is a part of the prologue to the poem. Here the poet condemns poetasters and justifies the use of the vernacular at a time when Sanskrit was still regarded as the language of culture.

I was born in the line of Pakkanar;<sup>1</sup>  
and I will not turn back from anyone  
who confronts me in a war of words.  
Fire burns down forests; it knows no bar;  
nothing can deter me  
from writing and reciting my smooth and steady verse.  
The corky rival's tricks, his seeming courtesy  
and learning and his indifferent dancing  
will cut no ice with this Pariah.  
This is no vain word; the proof indeed follows.  
How can I fail when my revered mentors are all there!  
The masterpiece of an earnest poet  
is plagiarised and stretched into some threadbare form  
by the poetasters who know no shame  
in presenting it to the public.  
It is no use commenting on them,  
they are so slow-witted.

1. Sage and poet of the lowest caste; a character in the Keralite myth of the twelve castes borne by a perish women.

If powdered margosa leaves  
 are mixed with sweet sugar,  
 no one is going to eat the stuff which is bound to be bitter.  
 If bilva flowers are woven with screwpine flowers  
 and varieties of jasmine,  
 all fine fragrance will be spoilt; it will stink.  
 I have no doubt about it;  
 let no one listen to the miserable poetaster.  
 Men of culture would like to listen to Sanskrit verse;  
 but the vulgar can find no delight in it.  
 Before an audience of the common people  
 who are out to see some vibrant folk show,  
 only the lovely, shapely language of Kerala is proper.  
 If we present the sound and fury  
 of pedantic Sanskrit verse,  
 the common man won't make head or tail  
 of such odd and obscure concoctions  
 and he will just get up and leave the place.  
 If the language is *manipravala*<sup>1</sup>  
 with a generous mix of the native tongue,  
 there is no harm, in fact it will be very fine.  
 Language has to fit in with the speaker's costume.  
 and only then will it delight people at large.

From *Sabhapravesam*, 18th century

Tr. by G. Kumara Pillai

## 2

### The Origin of Hanuman

*Hanumadudbhavam* is a very short *Shitankan Thullal* by Kunchan Nambiar. As the title suggests, it tells the story of the birth of Hanuman, the monkey-god. Shiva and Parvati take the form of monkeys and enjoy themselves in the forest. Parvati conceives, but does not want a child in the shape of a monkey. The wind-god transplants the foetus to the womb of Anjana, wife of the monkey, Kesari. Thus Hanuman is born as the son of Anjana and Maruti, the wind-god.

The following passage taken from the introductory part of *Hanumadudbhavam* is a piece of literary criticism. The poet here tries to justify the use of humour as a central device in poetry.

1. Language in which Sanskrit and Malayalam are blended.

In this Kaliyuga an audience that comes up to listen to tales  
tends to look for fun.  
The mighty ones, the old ones, the high-born, the women and the children  
—all prefer to listen to poetry that provokes laughter.  
They may be listening to a high serious story;  
and yet they seek some occasion for laughter.  
Even when death is imminent, people are senseless;  
they refuse to remember the lotus feet of Madhava.  
Like wooden puppets they move their hands and legs and their body;  
They show the power to walk or sit or lie down,  
when the string is pulled;  
and they fall down dead when the string is let off.  
It is all God's play.  
The man, who performs  
where the folks can't get the sense of what he shows, is a fool.  
It is just like dancing before a blind man.  
Poetry is effective only when it is tried out  
in an audience that can see into its meaning.  
The fools who sow seed in barren soil  
go in for a losing bargain.  
One learns an art in laborious ways;  
Why should it be wasted in a place of ignorant idiots?  
It is no use even if you perform a somersault;  
It may fetch you nothing but a headache.  
You may serve your wealthy lords;  
but you can grow rich only by the grace of fate.  
Shiva, the slayer of Kama, is Kubera's friend;<sup>1</sup>  
yet he goes about begging.  
For want of proper clothes  
he wears a leopard's skin.  
For want of milk he drinks poison.  
For want of ornaments  
he adorns himself with a chain of bones  
and has snakes for anklets and bracelets.  
Not having sandal-paste, vermilion or musk,  
he smears himself with white ashes.  
Not having any proper vehicle,  
he shuffles along on an old bull.  
He sustains himself on alms as he can command no food.  
Misfortune befalls even the mighty.  
Mahadeva, the foe of the Tripuras,

1. Kama-God of Love; Kubera - God of Wealth.



is there to dispense favour for the asking;  
 and yet he loafs about like a dirty beggar.  
 Who can unravel such mysteries?  
 Serving the rich is of no avail;  
 What you get depends on the sign of the zodiac at your birth.  
 Wealth and penury are but the consequences of one's karma.

From *Hanumadudbhavam*, 18th century

Tr. by G. Kumara Pillai

### 3

#### Kalyanasaugandhikam

Legend has it that *Kalyanasaugandhikam* (Kalyāṇasaugandhikam) was the first *thullal* composed by Nambiar and that he wrote it and had it performed to defy a chakiyar who had rebuked him for neglect of duty during a *koothu* performance. Whatever that may be, this is one of his finest achievements in the genre. The poem is based on an episode from Mahabharata. During the exile of the Pandavas in the forest, one day Draupadi is fascinated by the fragrance of a strange flower and she asks Bhima to fetch a few of these flowers for her. The impetuous Bhima starts immediately and marches forward hitting left and right with his club and smashing everything on the way. Finally he reaches the Gandhamadana Range where his elder half-brother, the redoubtable Hanuman, is leading a retired life of penance. Hanuman wants to help him, but only after teaching him the lesson of humility. He assumes the shape of decrepit monkey and lies across Bhima's path. This leads to a confrontation between them. The name of the mythical flower forms the title of the poem.

The following passage, depicting the confrontation between Bhima and Hanuman, is taken from the sithankan thullal *Kalyanasaugandhikam*.

The haughty Bhimasena saw an old monkey  
 lying in his way  
 and in an angry tone he said:

"You monkey, who bars my way,  
 move away, you impudent wretch.  
 How did you, old fellow,  
 think of lying in this awkward spot?  
 You are just a wild monkey,  
 incapable of identifying the lords of the land.  
 You were born and brought up  
 in a species that knows no discretion.  
 Have you missed the goal in your leap?  
 How is it that you are all alone?

Get away you damned monkey,  
or you are in for danger."  
Hearing the abusive words of Bhima,  
the old one said slowly with a laugh:

"Why should you speak in such rage against me?  
I am absolutely unable to get up and move aside.  
Please proceed by some diversion.  
It is no offence; just look at this miserable ape.  
I can't see, my body shakes,  
and many ailments trouble me.  
It is no lie; you can see it for yourself.  
My limbs have grown feeble.  
Why should you rail against me, my dear man,  
without knowing the real state of things?  
No one quarrels with those in such distress.  
What harm is there if you turn aside  
a step or two from the straight path?"

Hearing these words of old Maruti,  
Bhima, the younger Maruti, was incensed, and he cried:  
"Who do you take me for, you simian wretch?  
Your words of foolhardy impertinence  
have gone too far.

"Haven't you heard of a great man called Vrikodara,  
the heroic scion of the house of Puru?  
The self-same valiant grandee that is me,  
I never stray from the straight path.  
And I accept defeat from none.  
My club's head will fall on the chest  
of the fool who asks me to step aside.  
Get up and move away, you mean monkey.  
If some vulgar creature, who knows no etiquette,  
makes bold to shamelessly bar my way,  
and tease me thus, I won't bear it;  
I am Arjuna's elder brother.  
How can I speak to you of traditional values,  
when you know no such values?  
I am Dharmaputra's younger brother,  
and I never stray from the line of dharma,  
the line of traditional values—  
you should know that."

On hearing these words, Hanuman laughed and said:

“Very well, Bhima, you say you are principled,  
 but do your words conform to the truth?  
 Men of principle like Dharmaja and you—  
 is it true that you do nothing against the values of life?  
 I have heard that all the five of you  
 were infatuated with a girl called Panchali,  
 sought her hand and won it too.  
 You got married to her jointly.  
 As for her, she was undaunted.  
 Five? The more the merrier was her attitude.  
 And she is upto tricks against all of you alike—  
 she plays them with the corners of her eyes.  
 To have four or five husbands!  
 This is taboo for all the four castes.  
 And what a decent foursome cannot approve  
 is improper even for us, the tailed apes.  
 For some she is a senior sister-in-law,  
 for others a junior sister-in-law,  
 and for all the five guys she is a wife.  
 The funny goings-on among you provoke laughter.  
 You are no good, O son of Kunti!  
 And yet you have the cheek to tell me to my face  
 that you are the valiant Vrikodara,  
 who swerves not from the straight path.  
 O god, what else can I say?

“It amazes me to hear from you,  
 O son of the wind-god,  
 that you accept defeat from none.  
 Did not the Kaurava gang of the One Hundred  
 capture your lands, your towns and your kinsmen?  
 Are you not fellows who huddle in the forests  
 facing wind and rain and snow?  
 The wrongs you have done have recoiled on you,  
 and you are condemned to live away from home.  
 Ever since Prince Suyodhana drove you out,  
 you have never been able to come back to human haunts.  
 But is it sweet in the forests?  
 No, not at all.  
 Piercing thorns and stones,  
 blades of grass and creeping weeds

and gaping gutters hurt you as you roam about.  
 Yet your bragging knows no bounds.  
 Duryodhana cheated you at dice and pushed you out.  
 Scared, you ran away  
 and a female followed you to make fools of you.  
 Taking a fancy for anything she sets her eyes on,  
 she orders: "Bring it! Bring it!"  
 and you run about fearing her displeasure.  
 I knew your real position.  
 as soon as I saw you, Vrikodara."

As he heard these bitter words,  
 the angry Bhima said:

"Enough of your arrogance, you mocking monkey.  
 I refrain from beating up a nuxvomica—  
 munching, tree-hopping nimcompoop,  
 because he belongs to the tribe of Anjana's son.  
 You know nothing of the prowess of Bhimasena,  
 you inauspicious simian wretch!  
 It was I, Vrikodara, who smashed the chest  
 of the awful Rakshasa called Hidimba;  
 who packed off in a trice  
 the tough Rakshasa, Baka, to the nether world;  
 who like a murderous tusker  
 tearing a mighty palm tree with his trunk,  
 split into two the hefty body  
 of the proud king Jarasandha;  
 who with his club hit again and again  
 on the nerve-centres of the body of Kirmeera,  
 the ferocious Rakshasa, until he was destroyed  
 and thus protected the virtuous ways of the hermits.  
 And to me, with such splendid exploits to my credit,  
 a petty old monkey speaks impudent words of revilement!  
 Begone, you ugly-faced evil-minded wrinkled ape!"

Anjana's son thereupon spoke thus:  
 "Don't hesitate to belabour me, friend.  
 Your formidable prowess and equipment  
 that killed so many Rakshasas—  
 where were these qualities at that time?  
 I mean the time when,

on the tyrannical orders of Duryodhana,  
 Dushshasana approached Panchali,  
 beat her up, caught her by the hair,  
 dragged her into the court  
 and hit her publicly again and again  
 and then began to strip her.  
 All these wrongs were done  
 before the very eyes of all the five of you.  
 And you stared on, you hulking creature.  
 Where was your much-vaunted prowess at that time?  
 Had it gone on a pilgrimage to Kashi?  
 Tell me, Vrikodara:  
 when another man lays his hands  
 on your wife's clothes before your very eyes,  
 should you stand still like a worthless sissy  
 or rush forward to punch the fellow?  
 All your skill and daring  
 will in the end come to nought;  
 all your toughness is shown in confronting  
 with reddened eyes,  
 a petty monkey from some dark corner of the forest.  
 O valiant one,  
 why should you gnash your teeth,  
 beat down the creepers,  
 hit the trees,  
 smash the mountains and indulge in tall talk?  
 I have no strength to walk, I am laid up;  
 I can't move my shrunken tail.  
 Just jump over it and go.  
 Why should you hesitate, Bhima?  
 I don't wish to block your way."

Said Bhima:

"If these words of yours were spoken  
 by someone of some strength,  
 I would have given a fitting reply.  
 But when old folks abuse me again and again,  
 to kill is *infra dig* and so is not to kill.  
 If a hefty chap had come to defy me,  
 I would have punched him, broken his legs,  
 and thrown him into the woods.  
 But that is beside the point now.

If it is reported that the son of the wind-god  
killed an old monkey on the verge of death,  
decent men will laugh at me, you simian wretch!  
Nor can I step over you  
for it will be an awful thing, if I do so.  
O monkey, if I jump over you,  
I will be committing a sin,  
for you are born in the tribe of my senior,  
my mentor, Anjana's son, the noble, mighty ape."

In response to this, Hanuman said in a kind tone:

"If you are beset with doubts,  
you needn't do so.  
Please remove my tail from your way,  
and proceed along the direct path, you Bhimasena!  
If you are loath to touch an ape with your hands,  
lift the skeleton-like tail with your club,  
and promptly turn it aside and walk straight,  
my smart fellow.  
You can, thus, remove all obstacles in your way."

The Pandava pondered a while and asked:  
"Will it not break when I move it aside?"

"What will break, your club or my tail?  
Don't get angry,  
I didn't catch what you meant."

"No foe has dared to stand up to my mighty club  
which has smashed massive mountains into smithereens,  
you incorrigible fool.  
I hesitate because I fear  
it may hurt your mean creeping hairless tail.  
When I hear these things which are novel to my ears,  
anger flames up in me and it will burn your body.  
Will you be able to bear it now?"

With these words the furious Pandava rushed forward  
to lift with his sturdy club the end of the tail  
of the great devotee of Rama, the foe of the Rakshasas.

He exerted himself to raise the tip  
of the long tail with his club.  
He applied both his hands,  
roared twice or thrice and tried  
in myriad ways to lever it up,  
but the tail lay as unmoved as it could be.  
Bhima could not so much as move two hairs  
at the tip of the thick, long tail.  
He vainly tried all possible devices,  
and was filled with enough of shame, when he retreated.

"Alas! Things have come to such a pass  
that I can't lift this monkey's tail with my club.  
Why is it that the prowess of Bhima  
has now come to be of no avail,  
the self-same Bhima who has always been  
a conqueror in all directions?  
Is it some conjuror's trick?  
Why should my strength be of no avail?  
The wind-god's son vanquished by a petty monkey!  
Hearing this the gang of One Hundred  
will make fun of us,  
and our own friends are sure to mock at us.  
I no longer wish to live.  
I, the mighty Pandava, will liquidate  
the ancient monkey with my fists.  
I don't hesitate even to give up my life.  
Can this Bhima survive such humiliation?"  
Arguing thus in his mind,  
the furious Vrikodara rushed forward.

"Look here, you monkey  
who, in sheer pride, has begun to apply witchcraft,  
don't be under any illusion;  
your arrogance will all subside,  
if I challenge you to a single combat.  
Is it not sheer impudence  
to think that you can stop me,  
you creature with a wrinkled face?  
You are prone to scamper up a tree,  
the moment you smell an attack.  
And such a one's tricks can cut no ice with me.

Keep your idiocy to yourself, you ape.  
 When I start my tactical move,  
 Your stratagems will be of no avail.  
 If you approach me in brazen sauciness,  
 thinking that you can win  
 by what you have learnt through eye and ear,  
 I know how to meet your skills.  
 I will make you see there are strategic moves,  
 which nobody has ever seen till now.  
 If you cannot learn a thing from what you see,  
 you are sure to learn it when it hurts.  
 I have been provoked to use unpleasant language,  
 because of your misconduct.  
 Is it through sorcery  
 that you could block my passage?  
 Your occult words and secret deeds  
 and all other tricks will come to nought  
 in confronting the wind-god's son.  
 Can the ant presume to undermine the tower?  
 What can monkeys do to the likes of me?  
 We shout 'Stop, you monkey'!  
 and any monkey will raise his tail and flee."

Hearing these words of condemnation,  
 the old one laughed and spoke slowly:

"Dismiss me not as a mere monkey.  
 There are bullies even among monkeys.  
 Was it not a monkey that of old  
 chained with his tail the many-headed Rakshasa  
 and hopped across the four seas with him?  
 Another nonchalantly jumped across the high seas  
 to this Rakshasa hero's land, Lanka;  
 killed a lot of his ferocious retainers;  
 crushed his pleasure-garden;  
 cut the throat of the son of Lanka's lord,  
 as the prince came to attack him;  
 met the lotus-eyed Sita  
 to give her consolation in her woes;  
 and when the defiant Rakshasa king came  
 leapt into his chariot and hit him hard  
 on the cheeks with his mighty hands.



O Pandava, there are thus in our species;  
 many honourable ones I myself know.  
 It will be better if you scurry off,  
 instead of taunting me with my simian origin."

Hearing this Vrikodara said:

"My mentor, lord and master, my elder brother,  
 is Shri Rama's great devotee, the son of the wind-god,  
 the heroic Shri Hanuman of splendid prowess.  
 It is indeed a far cry from him to you.  
 Enough of your stupid talk,  
 You old monkey with your shrivelled body.  
 you are like a swarm of bees taking pride  
 in being winged like the great Garuda.  
 You are so haughty because you are born  
 in the family of Shri Rama's great devotee."

Hearing these proud words of the Prince,  
 Hanuman's mind was filled with pity and pleasure.  
 And suddenly he stood transformed  
 into a lofty snow-white figure  
 like the mighty Himalayas.  
 His tail was like a high and hefty flagstaff;  
 his eyes were red and large like copper boilers;  
 his glittering teeth curved like the crescent moon;  
 his mane was bright and wavy;  
 and his awesome face was framed with it.  
 His two stout and sturdy hands  
 were fit to vie with long and strong iron pestles.  
 His set of nails were rough and tough.  
 His neck was straight and thick.  
 His breast was like a massive mountain range.  
 His enormous belly, his large haunch and huge thighs  
 were splendid in size and shape.  
 Here were the calves and ankles  
 that crushed the walls of Lanka's towers,  
 and the nimble flower-soft feet that pulverized  
 the whole lot of the Rakshasa retinue.  
 O God, it shone like the bright moon:  
 the massive form in which Hanuman revealed himself,  
 the majestic form which inspired awe in the entire world.

The long, deep roar; the strange clattering sound;  
the shape and size of the huge body;  
the tough, hardy hands and legs;  
the fearsome costume; the formidable figure  
of the supreme jewel of the monkey race!  
What a noble form, deemed unique  
in all the three spheres of the universe!  
It stood filling the entire space  
under the sky and beyond,  
magnified as at the momentous leap across the seas,  
dazzling like a white peak of the great Vindhya;  
and the moment it suddenly appeared before his eyes,  
the brave Vrikodara was panic-stricken;

"What a strange turn of events!  
Why has it come about this way?  
What would I do now?  
O, what a miracle!"  
The thoughts of Kunti's son were filled with deep fear  
and he felt like fainting.  
As he read the signs from what he saw and heard,  
the idea flashed into his mind:  
"This is really my mentor, Hanuman."  
When the truth sank into Bhima's mind  
that this was the ardent devotee of Shri Rama,  
the great Maruti, son of the wind-god;  
the fire that consumed Rakshasa clans like moths;  
he burst into a song of praise:

"Victory to you, virtuous messenger of Shri Rama,  
victory to you, O great-souled one  
who made the lotus-mind of Janaki blossom once again;  
victory to you, who defied the high seas,  
O friend of the whole universe!  
Victory to you, Hanuman!"

With these words Bhima fell at his feet,  
and paid his respects to him.  
Then he prayed:

"Bless me, brave hero of the monkey race,  
sea-like in your splendour;

O sweet essence of all virtues!  
 Bless me, killer-god of the Rakshasa race;  
 you who are above the flow of death,  
 inimitable in the mastery of noble habits,  
 well-known for beating up the ten-headed one.  
 Bless me, O dweller in the trees,  
 endowed with a face as beautiful as a red-flower,  
 and a flair for burning up your enemies.  
 May the pity of your lordship's red feet,  
 which are like a pair of tender leaves,  
 have full play in my thoughts!"

The grand old monkey took the two hands of Bhima,  
 who thus extolled him and sought his blessings.  
 The lord of the monkeys,  
 the disciple of the sun-god,  
 held Bhima close to his spacious breast,  
 scarred by the arrows of the Rakshasas;  
 and stroking him again and again from head to foot,  
 he placed his hand on Bhima's head and blessed him.

From *Kalyanasaugandhikam*, 18th century

Tr. by G. Kumara Pillai

4

### The Episode of the Five Indras

*Panchendropakhyanam* (Pañcendropakhyanam) or The Episode of the Five Indras is a *parayan thullal*, the last of a trilogy dealing with the wedding of Panchali. It traces the earlier births of Panchali and the Pandavas to justify polyandry involved in their relationship by indicating the divine dispensation behind it. The episode of the five Indras tells how the Indra quintet is born again as the Pandavas and Nalayani as Panchali.

The passage given here is part of a dialogue between Nalayani and Indra. He explains to her why he has visited the earth. Yama, the god of death, has for years been absorbed in a sacrifice or yaga and, hence no living thing can die. This has created an embarrassing situation, which is described here with a rare sense of humour.

Thereupon Indra said: "I will tell you the truth.  
 Haven't you heard of someone called Indra?  
 I am that great hero known all over the world as Indra.  
 There is no one who has not heard of me, my moon-faced girl.

There is a reason for my visit to the earth.  
 Why should I hide it from someone like you,  
 who are so pleasing to my eyes?  
 Yama, the son of the sun-god,  
 has been engaged in a grand *yaga*  
 and he has been at it for a long, long time.  
 Human beings on the earth are deprived of death:  
 What a deplorable state!  
 But Yama is unperturbed.

He has been inside the sacrificial camp,  
 and performing the rituals for a thousand years.

The earth is filled with a crowd of ancients;  
 they can't die; the god of death is not available.  
 Old grand-dad's grand-dad is still alive,  
 and his own grand-dad is not yet dead.  
 Five-hundred-year-old grandpas pass off as babies;  
 they have got their grandpas.  
 In no homestead is there the wherewithal  
 even for a meagre meal a day.  
 For the children themselves ten bushels of rice are not enough.  
 Even if a hundred bushels are cooked,  
 it won't suffice for more than a morsel or two each  
 for the old alone.  
 There are a hundred million toothless ones  
 huddled together in the same house  
 like carved-out puppets.  
 Men whose very eyelashes have turned grey  
 are a legion; and there are as many such women.  
 Among the old are blind ones, deaf ones,  
 and those whose bald pates are shinier than polished plates.  
 Some have nothing but bones in their bodies.  
 There is no abatement for their disabilities.  
 They won't die even if they don't eat for ten days.  
 There is no living space in houses,  
 and the people are in dire distress.  
 Those who lie in elevated places tumble down;  
 they fall on rocks;  
 and their forehead, hands and legs are broken into fragments.  
 Not one or two, but a hundred thousand ancients  
 fall down in this manner:  
 but die they won't; nothing brings them loss of life.

The most miserable plight is that of the feudal lords.  
 They can't execute a thief;  
 cut a thief into pieces, he won't die.  
 Gangs move about nonchalantly  
 to pilfer everything; they know no fear.  
 In full day-light, robbers break into the royal quarters  
 and openly rob the royal coffers  
 as royal punishment becomes lax.  
 Temple rituals are discontinued;  
 Brahmins desert the sacred places.  
 Ministers don't care a fig for their princes;  
 and people have no fear in their mind for ministers.

Corruption has become rampant in the world.  
 Yama's *yuga* is the cause of all these mishaps.  
 Brahmins no longer perform sacrifices  
 or daily rituals or prescribe duties.  
 There is no temple for worship;  
 there is no one with peace of mind.  
 What else can we think of?  
 In line with the tendency of those irreverent ones,  
 rules of conduct have been subverted;  
 the chastity of noble women has vanished;  
 and men have presumed to tread the path of licence.  
 Don't you know that if evil men have no fear of death,  
 no one will desist from doing such things?  
 Prostitutes don't allow any approach  
 by men who pay for their rituals and their daily wear;  
 when they come, they are thoroughly beaten up by smart guys.  
 Rank immorality is spreading,  
 Things have become worse than in Kali Yuga.  
 The absence of Yama from the world  
 has made life miserable for all living beings.  
 You should know, my girl,  
 That if those who mar the family honour  
 won't die when killed, the family itself will be damned.

The teeming millions that increase and multiply  
 know no halt;  
 there is no vacant space anywhere in the world;  
 those who feed on meat cannot, at worst  
 get a morsel of rice; they can't end their lives either.

Leopards, swine and lions eat one another's raw meat throughout;  
 small fish are eaten wholesale by bigger ones,  
 but they come out unscathed at the other end.  
 The whole earth is filled with wild beasts.  
 There is no one to give food to anyone.  
 All travellers have to starve.  
 In towns there is no money, not even small change.  
 Brahmins who feed on free meals get no food;  
 for kitchens are overcrowded with masses of people.  
 Travelling dancers have given up their art;  
 their groups have broken up,  
 and they idle away their time in obscure corners.  
 Starvation has made musicians' voices hoarse;  
 they can't earn a coin from anywhere.  
 How can a starving man enjoy music  
 when he is down and out?  
 Tell him of a meal and he is sure to raise his head.  
 But such a thing is nowhere to be heard.

As numbers have increased,  
 the wretches have no longer the natural affection  
 for a younger brother or elder brother.  
 Elder brothers number not one or two,  
 but fifty or a hundred or even five hundred,  
 enough for a mass funeral ceremony,  
 But there is no death.  
 The chieftain gets no fines, no tributes, no customs duties.  
 Only the jungleman can eat something and sustain himself.  
 Fashionable men are nowhere to be seen;  
 all earnings have been spent on feeding oneself.  
 The fellow, who once stayed high up in his quarters  
 as the steward of the feudal lord  
 and enjoyed himself in the company of his woman,  
 now goes to the rice-dealer and touches his feet  
 in the hope of getting a morsel or two.

•  
 The affairs of the earth are indeed in a sad plight.  
 Why should I elaborate such unpleasant things now?  
 The astrologer with his bag of cowries  
 finds it difficult to cash in on his bogus prophecies.  
 Then hungry astrologer-physicians lie down in a group  
 with their books serving as pillows.  
 Once there was no difficulty in getting a modest sum

by just indicating the future in a general way.  
 But what is good luck and what is bad luck,  
 when there is no death at all?  
 There is nothing to be learnt by astrology.  
 There is no disease to be cured anywhere for anyone.  
 The human bodies are intact.  
 Yama's aides are absorbed in the progress of the *yaga*;  
 They have no instructions to go out.  
 Books of medicine have all been stacked away;  
 physicians need no longer crave for the sumptuous meals  
 from the patients' houses.  
 They can't prepare this or that medicinal oil  
 and make a pretty penny out of them.  
 Pretending to be elegant men of taste,  
 they used to don a bag and haunt the patient's house like demons,  
 and deal in pills, mixtures and tinctures,  
 but depart under some pretext  
 when this patient is about to die.  
 Now they can't do this.  
 There is no food at home either,  
 and they have to beg shamelessly for a meal  
 as there is no hospitality anywhere.  
 The physician's mind is loaded with learned quotations  
 from medical texts,  
 but he has no opportunity to apply them.  
 Though Yama, the god of death, and doctor are trusted friends.  
 the doctor cannot kill without Yama.  
 The practitioner of black magic too faces massive misfortune.  
 Though clever, he gets no payment anywhere.  
 In a land without death  
 people are not haunted by evil spirits,  
 who too have the god of death as their tutelary deity.  
 The god of death has been engrossed in the sacrifice  
 and the evil spirits have been lying low.  
 Oracles who dance when possessed by their deities  
 are also in difficulty; they can't bear their hunger.  
 They have all been lying in hidden places.  
 They are incapable of lifting their swords,  
 and their dancing has come to have no effect.

There is no end, my girl, if I describe such calamities."

## Rukmini's Marriage

*Rukminiswayamvaram* (Rukminiswayamvaram) is an *ottan thullal* which tells the story of Shri Krishna's marriage to his chief consort, Rukmini, princess of Vidarbha. Bhishmaka, her father and Rukmi, her brother, want to give her away in marriage to Shishupala, king of Chedi. But she is in love with Krishna and secretly informs him of her desire. Krishna arrives at the venue of the *swayamvara* (literally, the choice of the bridegroom by the bride) and carries her off by force. Rukmi, Shishupala and other princes, who challenge him, are defeated by Krishna before he leaves with Rukmini.

The present passage from the beginning of the poem deals with Bhishmaka's first announcement regarding the ceremony at Kundinam, capital of Vidarbha. It is a portrayal in a lighter vein of the faults and foibles of men.

"I submit this to the citizens of Kundinam:  
 The girl has completed ten years;  
 she has to be given away in marriage to a man of many-sided merit.  
 The first consideration is nobility of caste;  
 all the virtues of the caste should blend in him.  
 He should be an expert in various kinds of craftsmanship,  
 and he should be strong in mental power.  
 The man should be good-looking,  
 and this is a special requirement.  
 He should be rich in material things,  
 in great qualities, in the sway over men  
 and in victories in war.  
 I expect him to be well-versed in the sciences,  
 and to possess mastery in the use of arms.  
 The man should be endowed with beauty  
 as also with sympathy and sensibility  
 and many other qualities.  
 He has to be clever, renowned and respectable  
 besides being a man of achievement.  
 He should especially have the prowess  
 to suppress enemies on all hands.  
 I expect him to be well-read in drama, poetry and mythology.  
 He has to be sharp in the use of logic and grammar,  
 and he should write and recite such poetry  
 as will promptly delight people with an ear for such things.  
 I want him to be dexterous in handling cowries.  
 He should, in fact, surpass others in all these.



He should have excellence in music,  
 and exquisite skill in various practical affairs.  
 I want him to have mastery of astrology and medicine.  
 He should respect vedic injunctions,  
 and deserve the trust of gods and Brahmins.  
 He should have learnt the hard way  
 the arts of testing gold and precious stones.  
 Why should I expatiate on this?  
 I have many more things in mind.  
 The man who has all such excellences  
 is the proper one to marry my daughter.  
 If there is such a man anywhere on the earth,  
 bring him here;  
 I have no hesitation in giving my daughter to him.  
 No one else is fit to marry her.  
 The sluggard and the drunkard,  
 the paunchy one and the prodigal,  
 the wrinkled bloke and the stunted, shrunken guy,  
 the pug dwarfish fellow and the pale decrepit chap,  
 the cheat and the churl  
 the short-tempered quarrelsome devil,  
 the bald one and the too bold one  
 the liar, the poetaster and the tale-bearer,  
 the sophist and the fancy bully who tends to harass others,  
 the fool and the rogue who shout abuses;  
 no such fellows shall hope for my daughter's hand in marriage.'

Upon this, Rukmini's brother, Rukmi, told his father:  
 "My father, faultless men are few on this earth.  
 In a concourse of a hundred thousand people,  
 such paragons may number just one or two.  
 A man has a fine body; but he has a limp when he walks,  
 Another is handsome, but alas! he is one-eyed.  
 Still another one has many good qualities,  
 but his eyes are rather grey like those of a cat;  
 he is no fit person for us  
 for if we take him, onlookers will laugh at us.  
 This man is very scholarly,  
 but he has no tooth to be seen in his mouth.  
 Here is a man of many-sided merits;  
 but his hair is as white as snow.  
 Here is another man, smart and well-dressed,

but he has no hair on his head.  
 This man is master of all the scriptures;  
 but his body is miserably deformed;  
 and what is more, he is so deaf  
 that even gun shots make no impact on his two ears.  
 This man knows by heart all commentaries on grammar  
 and besides, he is witty in his speech,  
 but he too has a fault: he is slightly squint-eyed.  
 One is a logician who has come through many contests,  
 but his body is ungainly.  
 This man can grasp a hundred thousand verses  
 by just hearing them once;  
 but alas! he can't reproduce them,  
 because he is a stammerer.  
 He knows a great many myths,  
 but as he tells them, his utterance becomes  
 'ka-ka-ka-ka-kamsa', 'ki-ki-ki-ki Krishna'  
 and 'pu-pu-pu-pu Putana'.  
 Here is a high-born man who is good-looking too;  
 but he is unlettered;  
 he doesn't have even a nodding acquaintance with A B C.  
 In looks he is stately,  
 but in learning he is nothing but an ignoramus.  
 This man has studied his books of astrology and medicine,  
 and is well-known for his virtues;  
 but he has not an iota of affability.  
 Thus men have numerous defects and each has a different one.  
 Here is a man of appearance,  
 but he is prone to misconduct and is easily provoked;  
 short-tempered in dealing with people,  
 coming to blows with any man at the second word.  
 This guy, with his handle-bar moustache,  
 his Dutch gun and his sparse goatee,  
 has the premier social position in his region,  
 but he is absolutely worthless on the battlefield.  
 An ancient fellow whose hair is as white as cotton wool.  
 has no wherewithal even for a meagre meal.  
 For fifty years his nose and chin have been in close touch,  
 yet on the battlefield  
 this grandpa is still recklessly aggressive.  
 He still goes about with a gun;  
 death is not for him.

One fellow frequents free kitchens for meals  
 and goes about singing cheerfully.  
 He seldom stays at home  
 for he has debts to clear,  
 but there are no assets in his name.  
 "Uncle was a man of letters,  
 and he was good at getting prizes for poetry.  
 He was not too poor, either.  
 But giving too many gifts to his wife and children,  
 he has impoverished his own family and left it starving.  
 This is the misfortune brought about by the damn'd fellow."  
 Thus a smart johnny ridicules his ancestors.  
 Even if one has many virtues,  
 disrespect to one's elders brings in a flaw.  
 When I consider these things  
 I don't feel like giving away the girl  
 immediately and without hesitation  
 to any of these fat fellows who are about.

From *Rukminiswayamvaram*, 18th century

Tr. by G. Kumara Pillai

### Syamantakam

*Syamantakam*, another *ottan thullal* by Kunchan Nambiar, takes its title from the name of a precious stone with divine powers. Satrajit, a member of Krishna's Yadava clan, wins it as a gift by propitiating the sun-god. His younger brother, Prasena, wears it and goes hunting. He is killed by a lion and the stone is taken from the lion by Jambavan, the immortal monkey of great prowess. Prasena's people do not know what has happened to him. Krishna, being accused of secretly killing him and robbing the stone, goes in search of it and recovers it after a fight with Jambavan; he also wins the hand of the old one's daughter, Jambavati, in the bargain. When the stone is restored to Satrajit, the latter is repentant and offers his daughter, Satyabhama, in marriage to Krishna.

The following passage occurs towards the close of the poem. The various scenes of the festivities connected with the double-wedding are described here:

There were many edifices;  
 large sheds were put up around them all.  
 They were so high that they seemed to touch the sky.  
 The tall pillars were made of sandalwood.  
 Everything else was made of eagle wood.  
 These temporary structures were wide and long.

A senior minister came up to give orders:  
 "The team of twelve ministers should work jointly.  
 Please remember that many a noble man will be here.  
 The feast should be sumptuous,  
 and you should set your mind on it.  
 Many hands are required to look after  
 those who come from abroad.

Provincial ministers should be accommodated in the house.  
 Princes themselves, who come with fanfare,  
 should be lodged upstairs.  
*Akkithiris*, *chomatiris* and famous *patteris*,  
 other blue-blooded ones, ministers, high priests  
 and slow-witted *Namputiris*.  
 when all these come,  
 the lower priests should take care of them.  
 Physicians and astrologers too have to be lodged.  
 To keep the boxes of *Kathakali* troupes  
 special sheds have to be constructed.  
 The boys in the *yatra* teams  
 may be given rice, vegetables and vessels.  
 There are rogues who drink toddy;  
 urine may be passed straight into their throats.  
 Miscreants who commit nuisance inside the fort  
 may be soundly beaten up.  
 By sun-down the whole place should be lighted up.  
 Those who pass urine inside the fort  
 may be tripped up with a stick.  
 Those who don't obey orders  
 cannot escape the inevitable punishment.  
 You, Yadavas, should know,  
 these are the instructions of Lord Krishna."

When these solemn words were spoken,  
 the minds of the assembled people brightened up.  
 Festivities started promptly.  
 And the auspicious moment was fast approaching.  
 In order to dress up the brides,  
 doe-eyed women came cheerfully after bath,  
 and without delay took girls sportively by the hand.  
 They slowly separated, strand by strand.  
 the long, dark, curly hair of the brides,  
 tied it up and decked it up with amaranth blossoms.

And they trimmed their front locks.  
 They put fine cosmetic marks on the girls' foreheads.  
 And to their bright eyes  
 as charming as delicate lotus-petals,  
 they applied collyrium  
 to add to their sex appeal,  
 The women decked them up with ear-rings and necklaces,  
 with bangles on their hands,  
 numerous rings on their fingers,  
 and golden anklets on their indescribably tender feet.  
 The women and the brides' maids  
 themselves were made up with taste,  
 and they remained happily intermingled with the brides.

The dark-eyed Mukunda  
 arrived in state at the decorated pandal,  
 and gladly performed all the prescribed rites,  
 required of him at his marriage  
 to the two pretty maidens.  
 Then the cloud-dark one gave away  
 many rich gifts to the Brahmins.  
 At the auspicious moment  
 he took Satyabhama's hand in holy matrimony;  
 he took Jambavati also as wife,  
 after distributing to the Brahmins  
 gold, silks, bangles and betel-nuts;  
 he went through the essential sacred ceremony  
 with fire as witness.  
 And then, accompanied by Devaki, Vasudeva,  
 his chief consort Rukmini and his retinue of Yadavas,  
 he retired into his splendid palace  
 and began to enjoy himself.

At sunrise stewards climbed up the shelves  
 took out oil and began to distribute it.  
 Numerous pattars' walked in,  
 put down their luggage and hurrayed.  
 They stood below the shelves, stretched out their heads,  
 and began to oil themselves.

They beat upon their hair noisily  
 and rubbed the oil in lavishly  
 so that it trickled down.  
 They approached the shampoo-bearers,  
 who in turn poured liquid shampoo into their eyes.  
 Some slipped on the shampoo spilt on the floor;  
 they snatched away pads of soapy bark  
 from the bearers  
 and some hid the pads in their bags.  
 The bags of the pilferers were promptly siezed,  
 and they were deported by boat from the waterfront.  
 Some were seen fooling about the bathing ghats,  
 while others soaped themselves or took the dip.  
 After the bath each put on his dhoti of fine cotton or silk,  
 tucking it loosely between the legs in the broad fold.  
 And they rushed to the dining hall and spread their towels.  
 How strange was the conduct of these pattars  
 as they prepared themselves to partake of the feast.

How can I describe the wonderful scene  
 unfolding in the kitchen at that time?  
 Some were feeding the fire with wood.  
 Some were drawing water and storing it.  
 Some were moving around, putting on airs,  
 while others were gossiping and laughing:

"Dresserbury and Salterton, take the vessel  
 and drain the water away from this.  
 You are the fittest persons to hold the crossbar  
 and heave the vessels.  
 Cradlebury, you should take the ladle  
 to stir the vegetable curry.  
 Masterbury, fry the mustard;  
 Cocobury, roast the coconut;  
 to make jackfruit pudding  
 Sackford has a special knack.  
 Spitfire is an expert in cooking spinach;  
 Brindleton will be carried away when he prepares brinjal.  
 Goosecote Junior, the third one,  
 is good at making gooseberry pickle.  
 In clinching any quality test of dishes,  
 Uncle is the first among the best.

To see to the perfect frying of chips  
there is none to rival Crippoton.  
We don't have enough water;  
where are the drawers of water,  
where are the truant rogues?  
Fifty more copper vessels are required;  
the largest cauldrons should come first.  
Retainers, you useless fellows,  
so small a quantity of plaintains will not do.  
For making crisps, we need to slice enough to fill a three-bushel basket.

If mango soup is to be made,  
this much ground coconut won't suffice."  
Speaking sundry things like this,  
they began to cook with gusto.

"I don't enjoy chewing", said one,  
"unless I have good tobacco.  
If you have betel and nuts,  
I will look for tobacco in my pouch."  
"I have never seen tobacco in your pouch;  
if it is a ruse to wangle betel and nuts,  
it won't work with me."  
"I am not like you  
to snatch whatever I see and eat it up."  
"If you say that I eat up things,  
you are sure to get slapped."  
"Are you to slap me,  
you who play the fool before servant-maids,  
present them with clothes on the sly,  
hide in the loft to escape detection,  
and run away when beaten by Nairs?"  
"Who is going to come before me and stop me  
if I beat you?"  
"If I get blows on my cheeks,  
should I explain to you how I will face it?"  
"Shut up, you fool; stop, you worthless fellow.  
This venture may not do you good."

"I will break your bones  
and knock down your teeth with whatever I get."  
Bandyng such words between each other,  
two Brahmins with martial training,  
came forward for a fight.

Brandishing their wooden planks  
girding up their loins and their pot-bellies to boot,  
they began to exhibit their idiocies.  
They trembled violently and sweated profusely.  
They caught hold of each other's clothes  
and ran about confronting each other,  
until, tripped by some bars, they fell down together.  
The onlookers clapped their hands and roared with laughter.

When the leaves were about to be laid for the feast,  
many men came to serve the guests.  
Those who had booked their seats  
began to quarrel with one another.  
"Are you to sit in the place I booked,  
you, cantankerous fellow?"  
"This is not your seat;  
it was I who had spread the towel first."  
"Before you spread your towel,  
I had marked two lines here  
Didn't you see that?"  
"I did not see anything,  
you must have done it long ago."  
Such was one of the noisy quarrels.

When all the people had come and sat in the dining hall,  
perfume-bearers came with sweet-smelling sandalpaste,  
and distributed it among them all.  
The sandalpaste in the bowls was mixed with a solution  
of powdered costus-roots, eagle wood, pigal and spikenard,  
and it was made more fragrant,  
with powdered civet, fresh civet, aromatic leaves,  
powdered cuscus, jasmine and champak buds,  
along with many more honeyed flowers and rose water.  
Besides this, saffron, sandal and mixed cosmetic paste  
reached the rows of Brahmins.  
Leaves were laid in the hall,  
and water was duly served.  
Cooked rice, white like fried corns, came next.  
Chips of several varieties came in the proper order.  
Ten to thirty *pappads* were served in each leaf,  
and *pappads* as large as elephants' feet were a speciality.  
Commented one:



"Jackfruit pudding and nectar; if the two are weighed,  
the scale with nectar would always be borne up."

Said another:

"Among puddings steam cake pudding is the very best."

A third one remarked:

"I have no interest in the various curries and worries;  
if I am served ketchup and lentil-soup,  
it is a sumptuous meal for me."

And there were many other remarks:

"You Nampuri, cranky fellow, give me plenty of sour soup.

Is it your personal property?

I have come just for the meal."

"This much sugar is enough;  
give me a little *chutney* powder."

"Give me some soup or group,  
some fruit or sort, ketchup or hiccup."

"If you have brinjal curry, give me a little."

"Hatana, Hanna, Maniya, Swami,

Abba, Subba, Venkatrama,

Sitarama, Kolathuram,

I am the elephant-snatcher, Maniyan."

"Good gracious! what an arrogance!"

"Is it their fathers' property?"

"Give me, O give me a full measure of rice,  
serve it here."

What an orgy of feasting the Brahmins had had in this way!

Some were engaged in warming milk;  
a few were seen walking about with an air of self-importance.  
Some came forward to serve pickled mango and lemon,  
or curds and sour milk.

"Molasses pudding is coming;  
let us consume it in a leisurely manner."

"In drinking buffalo's curds,  
I am number one among those who have come."

"Bring me two whole bunches of ripe plantains."

"Bring *pappads* here."

They shouted like this with gusto

And the delight provided by the sight of their enjoyment  
was such that it is too difficult to describe.

At one spot there were also mendicant monks from the north,  
 Speaking among themselves  
 and calling to the bigwig seated with them:  
 "Victory to Ram, O victory to Ram,  
 Sitaram, Ram;

Victory to Ram, O victory to Ram.  
 Kodandaram, Ram,  
 Where do you hail from?  
 I hail from Kashi.  
 Where are you bound for, mate?  
 Sitaram Ram, Brahma Devo  
 I am bound for Davan Daro  
 Bring, O bring good water;  
 Bring the leaf plates, bring the cooked vegetables  
 Bring sweets, bring bananas  
 Bring the things yourselves, do it soon.  
 Bring arecanuts, bring sugar  
 Bring pancakes , you bring ten of them.  
 Bring them hot, bring tobacco,  
 Bring the drinks, bring sugarcane,  
 Bring salt, the cooked vegetables are bad,  
 Drink water, my tummy is full  
 Utturumayi kumkuru.kumkuru  
 Go, go home, my boy, go home."

There was such a hallabaloo of voices  
 in all the wards inside the walled city of the perfect one  
 Vaniyans, Konkanis and Chettis were there,  
 exhibiting their wares;  
 and my muse lacks the power  
 to describe how they held the fair.  
 As the great wedding festival came to a grand conclusion  
 after days and nights of pomp and splendour,  
 the multitude that had come to attend it,  
 promptly departed with a sense of gratefulness.

From *Syamantakam*, 18th century

Tr. by G. Kumara Pillai

### Notes

AKKITHIRIS etc: Nampuri (Namputiri) is a common name for Malayali Brahmins. Akkithiris, Comatiris and Patteris (Bhattatiris) belong to the highest class among them.

*Yatra*: A dramatic group game once prevalent among Namputiris.

*Vrishnis*: Yadavas.

*Pattar*: Tamil Brahmin. The community was once teased for a craving for a sumptuous meal, esp. a free one.

*Dresserbury* etc: These are quibbling references to houses (Illams) of Namputiris. The names given here are neither the original ones nor their translations. They have been transformed to retain a semblance of the puns.

*Nair*: A dominant Kerala community. The term also indicates (1) typical gentleman; and (2) the husband of a Nair woman.

*Natana, Hanna* etc: Names of Tamil Brahmins.

*Victory to Ram* etc. This passage is written in some sort of dialectal Hindustani. Hence the translation is not accurate.

*Pancake*: The north Indian dish *puri*.

*Utturunayi*: This line seems to be nothing but facetious gibberish.

*Vaniyans* etc: Trading communities.

7

## The Story of Nala

*Nalacharitam* (Nalacaritam), an *ottan thullal* by Kunchan Nambiar, deals with the well-known love-story of Nala, king of Nishadha, and Damayanti, princess of Vidarbha. The whole story of Nala is narrated by Unnayi Varier in the Kathakali classic, which has the same title.

The present passage from the early part of the poem describes the trip of the swan from Nishadha to the capital of Vidarbha as the messenger of Nala, who has fallen in love with Damayanti on hearing the swan's own praise of her.

The bird began to fly in the direction of the city of Kundina  
and the moving bird looked like another moon in the sky.  
As the swan moved along, cherishing the memory of Nala,  
it flew speedily over many regions,  
crossing castles and cities, monasteries and moats,  
parks and trees, leas and lakes.  
As it left these behind and proceeded,  
it saw hamlets and houses,  
shelters and stretching fields,  
carts and crevices, loads and homes,  
and in homesteads it saw a fine show  
of the foolishness of Nairs quarrelling with their wives.  
Some were seen breaking the kitchen pots on the rubbish heap.  
others were seen pulling out clothes and sheets,  
tearing them into pieces and burning them.  
Pangachar was seen knocking down the teeth of his wedded wife  
and his angry mother, taking a stout pestle

and hitting him on the cheeks.  
 hearing some hubbub in another place,  
 the swan promptly reached there.  
 He hid himself on the top of a coconut tree  
 in the outer courtyard and listened.  
 Nair came hungry and tired,  
 expecting some hot gruel.  
 But those at home had not yet started cooking rice.  
 In a fit of anger he threw his weapons into the bushes,  
 poured the boiling water on the heads of his kids,  
 and without any compunction beat his wedded wife  
 with whatever stick he could lay his hands on.  
 He smashed the metal basins and water pots,  
 dropped the big mortar into the well,  
 set the coconut-scraper on fire,  
 and hurled the grinding stone into the pond.  
 As his anger did not cool with this,  
 he ran and ran around the house.  
 When the swan saw all this he exclaimed:  
 "O god, O god!"

After half a mile, he saw a fine highway.  
 As he went along he saw  
 pipal trees and banyan trees, palaces and market places,  
 streets and streams, several trees and trim avenues,  
 residences and rest-houses,  
 gardens bright with fresh flowers,  
 platforms, shops and porter's rests,  
 barns, and ponds, wells and well-laid yards,  
 shades and sands, and soaring towers,  
 and then came the fine fragrance of basil leaves.  
 It was all so alluring.

Gradually a temple came into view  
 and the swan heard loud sounds of drums.  
 A lighted temple lamp was seen shining on its stand.  
 Large buildings also came into view.  
 It was the time of flag-hoisting  
 for the festival in the Vishnu temple.  
 The flagstaff was visible overhead.  
 Many fat fellows came up to see the grand festivities.  
 Considering these things,

the swan flew up and sat on the top of a pipul tree.  
Then people came from various directions,  
and they began to spread out.  
Some came to the pipul platform  
and stayed on there to see the show.  
Hurrying and shouting,  
frantically sportive mortals came,  
and crowded into the space around.

Men of the royal forces on the go;  
ornamental umbrellas as white as snow,  
the smooth gait of sweet maids,  
small parrots and their mates,  
elephants and their cows,  
perfumed hair that wafted its smell around,  
brawls and promptly delivered blows,  
streets decked lavishly with pennons,  
the spasmodic report of ceremonial guns  
from different parts,  
fresh flowers and their fine pollen,  
boxers and fencers skilful in their arts.

There were deafening sounds of drums and pipes  
and tempting feats shown on the raised stage,  
which did not make the drummer and the piper falter.  
In one place were groups  
bedecked with silks, cotton clothes, bangles and flowers,  
and accompanied by all the paraphernalia  
or ornamental fans and ceremonial umbrellas,  
armed escorts and ritual courtesies,  
and well-designed lines of festal lights,  
burning in circular formations.  
In another place were crowds of *Pattars*.  
In a different place were young guys,  
who stood all around groups of girls,  
observing and enjoying the sight or sound  
of their blue hair, shapely breasts,  
well-made-up foreheads, fashionable clothes,  
vibrant eyes and sweet talk.  
In a still different place  
the idol of the Lord was mounted on an elephant,  
saluted by a variety of beating drums,  
escorted by armed soldiers,  
and entertained by delightful songs.

As the swan was thus enjoying  
 the different items of the festivities,  
 it saw certain men and women assembled at a spot.  
 With the border of his wide dhoti sweeping the ground,  
 and holding a staff in his hand,  
 there came a stout fellow accompanied by a female.  
 He was heard giving orders to the drummers:  
 "Marars should know what is what.  
 If the drumming is faulty  
 on the day the Lord's flag is hoisted,  
 it will be an unpardonable lapse.  
 If as a result, mischief-mongers start a quarrel  
 and the programme is interrupted,  
 you, performers on the *chenda*, beware:  
 there will be orders to cut off your fingers.

To drum on the *timila*,  
 there is no equal these days for our Komari.  
 The old fellow who tries to blow the pipe  
 should stop this business.  
 For the horn we should have Nampan;  
 he is first among the best for it .  
 For the trumpet there is no one greater than Kelan.  
 The only thing is that in orchestra  
 he may err a little in keeping time;  
 and that, of course, is a fault.  
 The man with the gong lacks the talent  
 to complete a rhythmic movement with it.  
 When *takil* is beaten lustily  
 in the midst of a large concourse,  
 people will move away,  
 tucking cotton into their ears and shuddering.  
 There is a fellow called Putuval;  
 he is the man for new-fangled ways;  
 That is how he got his name.  
 He need not come here too often.  
 We have had enough of his cleverness.  
 If the boy blows the conch,  
 we have no quarrel with him.  
*Itayka* experts who are suitable for the music  
 may be taken in; they alone are needed.  
 Those who have come merely for free meals  
 will not be commissioned.

Three or four *maddalams* and eight or ten timbrels:  
that will do, the rest can go.  
We want the *tuti*, the *para* and the *utuk* too.  
The drummer should have discipline,  
and the drumming should have a proper design."

The swan saw these different items of delightful festivities;  
then it got ready to fly,  
and soon resumed its onward journey.

### Notes

*Marars*: One of the communities engaged in temple service, traditional experts in drumming.

*Chenda, timila, takil, itayka, maddalam, tuti, para*: Different kinds of drums.

*Putuvak*: Literally it means "new man"; it is the name of a community; the more common form of the name is Potuval (a public servant).

From *Nalacharitam*, 18th century

Tr. by G. Kumara Pillai

### 8

### The Story of Shri Krishna

*Shrikrishnacharitam Manipravalam* (Śrīkrṣṇacaritam Maṇipravāḷam) is one of Nambiar's early works. It is a narrative poem in 913 quatrains of the Sanskrit pattern divided into twelve cantos. It tells the story of Lord Krishna upto the period before his ascent to heaven. The poem contains little of Nambiar's famous humour; but its simple, lucid style and melodious versification have made it a very popular work.

The passage given here is from canto 6 (verses 23-41), where Krishna tries to teach the milkmaids a lesson because of their vanity. Each milkmaid thinks that she is his favourite, and hence he vanishes suddenly with Radha, the humblest among them. The milkmaids go about looking for their lord lamenting over their misfortune. The lament is, by and large, conventional in theme and imagery.

"Have you seen him, O kindly mango-tree,  
have you seen his lovely, charming form?  
If you have, your mind is sure to affirm  
that even the love-god cannot be a match for him. (23)

Tell me, white jasmine, tell me all the news about my Lord.  
It will fill my heart with welling cheer.  
There is now no joy for me,  
this is the fate of all whom God forsakes. (24)

Listen to me, O Ashoka;  
Mukundan, the rising moon of all the world,  
has left all other girls  
and lives alone with none but Radha by his side. (25)

How wayward it is, listen, O Palasha tree,  
to hear this would grieve your mind too.  
The great one has suddenly vanished,  
leaving us as though we were like any other citizen. (26)

Tell us all the news, O Amaranth,  
has the eminent foe of Madhu crossed your path?  
Heedless of his famous love for girls,  
he has disappeared in the woodlands. (27)

Let me tell you our tale, O Jasmine,  
Mukundan has cruelly betrayed us all.  
He has gathered us all in one place and walked out on us.  
Does he mean that all is over with us? All joy has gone! (28)

Please tell us, tell us, little parrot,  
don't hesitate to tell the truth;  
were you able to see my handsome Krishna anywhere,  
the bright-faced master of all playfulness? (29)

He has cloud-dark hair, adorned with a peacock feather;  
his body has the blue splendour of Kalaya blossoms;  
his eyes are blue and his face is lit with a brilliant smile.  
These are the distinguishing marks of our young Lord. (30)

Have you seen, O beetle, the shapely form of Vasudeva!  
I bet you have not;  
if you have, you would for ever sing its praise  
and never abandon the fragrance of his lotus-face. (31)

Sing, O cuckoos, sing in profusion,  
in praise of the rich melody of the young Lord's flute;  
its music falls like nectar on mortal ears;  
though none but the blessed can hear its tune. (32)

You dancing peacocks, if you chance to see  
the charming-form of the Lord of songs, the foe of Madhu;  
it will arouse your envy  
for it will dim the hue of your proud uplifted neck. (33)



O majestic swan,  
 bright like the smiles of the lord in dalliance,  
 have you seen Radha's lover today?  
 Please listen: I spell out his distinguishing marks. (34)

On his magnificent chest he wears the *Kaustubha* jewel  
 besides the special mark of *Shrivatsa*.  
 Govinda is dressed in splendid yellow silk;  
 and he has a fondness for cows. (35)

Come, wild elephant,  
 has the noble Vasudeva crossed your forest haunts?  
 If you were to see his slow, stately gait,  
 it would surely put you to shame. (36)

The wailing milkmaids wandered here and there.  
 They were dead tired, and suddenly then  
 Radha, deserted by the enemy of Mura,  
 joined them, distraught with grief. (37)

Full of regret, seeking news about her Lord,  
 complaining to birds, beasts and trees,  
 and shedding copious tears,  
 she had come through the forest, her heart  
 pierced by the love-god's arrows. (38)

Having come to know of the women's woes,  
 Lord Vasudeva's mind was swayed by pity;  
 and soon the charming Lord  
 appeared before them. (39)

I lack the skill to narrate  
 their excitement as they saw him;  
 the cloud-hued one revelled with the lovely maids  
 in unprecedented abandon. (40)

The bevy of women in distress were delighted  
 as Mukundan rested his benign eyes on them;  
 it was as though the woodlands wilting under the hot sun  
 were drenched in fresh rainfall gushing from dark clouds. (41)

## The Book of News

PAREMMAKKAL THOMA KATHANAR

PAREMMAKKAL THOMA KATHANAR (Parēmmākkal Tōma Kattanār, 1736-1799), along with Kariyattil Ouseph Malpan, set out on a journey to Rome to have an audience with the Pope for bringing to his notice certain problems faced by native Christians. It was in October 1778 and the route they followed was via Cape of Good Hope and Portugal. The hazardous journey took two years. He returned to Kerala after a period of six years and then began to write a travelogue on his experiences in the West, *Vārthamanappusthakam* (Vartamānappustakam), which he completed in 1786. It was in the form of a prose narrative, rarely attempted in those days, and hence it has come to represent an early phase of Malayalam prose.

The extract given below (Chapter xxvi) gives a graphic account of Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, in the 18th century.

When originally founded, Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, was a small city. Ever since the royal residence was shifted to Lisbon, it has become one of the reputed cities in Europe today.

The city of Lisbon is eight miles in length and six miles in breadth. The houses and towers in this city are not as tall as those either in Geneva or in Rome. Yet some are two-storeyed, and some four-storeyed. A careful observer of the city can discern that those who laid its foundation never intended to build it in such huge proportions. As the royal residence had been shifted to the city, commerce and trade flourished there, and there was an inflow of people from other cities into Lisbon. After they settled down, new areas were added to the city. Though the city is not well-planned, its roads are straight and well-laid out.

There are very many diocesan churches, monasteries and convents with chapels attached to them within the city; thus the city echoes with the ringing of bells on days of religious festivals. I am not informed enough either to describe the din of the running coaches or to recount the size, number and distinctions of the monks and nuns in that city; and it is not directly related to our subject either, yet I am making a note of some of the things I came to know because our people are eager to learn about such things. Among the orders of the monks, the most important are the order of St. Benedict, several orders of St. Francis, the order of St. Dominic, the order of St. Devosi<sup>1</sup>, the order of St. Augustine, the order of Canonists, the order of St. Khaitan, two orders of Carmelites, that is Discalced and Calced, the order of St. Kamirli, the order of penance called Nazra, the order of holy death and several other monks in addition other than these.

The orders of the nuns comprise Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, Carmelites of both kinds of nuns of St. Santa Clara and several orders other than those of holy women who have taken the vows. Besides these several Fraternities, that is Brothers of the Holy Eucharists, and Brothers of the Seven Sorrows of

St. Mary, Brothers of the Holy Ghost, Brothers of the Holy Rosary and Brothers of Mercy, Brothers of Charity and several other groups of Brothers.

There are houses for the destitute and the demented, built with munificent contributions from the king and the rich, income enough to meet the expenses of their inmates and those who attend on them. There are also the Mercy church with supports poor priests and laymen out of the Eucharistic offerings, the Roda, the shelter for illegitimate babies instituted to save unwedded mothers and mankind at large from the sin of infanticide, with provisions made to meet the expenditure incurred for the children and for payment for their nurses; orphanages, reformatory schools for unruly children and counselling centres for wives, disloyal and defiant, and for husbands who illtreat and oppress their wives. This way there are special and separate arrangements made to meet a variety of human needs, and also sources of income to cover the expenses on each item.

As in other European cities, here too, at the northern lateral end of the city in length and in breadth, there are a series of squares. Of such squares the most distinguished is "Prasa de O India" on the river at the north-eastern side. Not only is its floor level, but at the northern-most end there is also a long, tall, huge building, constructed for storing the goods imported from India. On the southern side of the square another square has been built with space for several courts and magistrates for them and there is a royal palace of the same height on the western side of this square. Right at the centre of the square there is a pedestal in marble with steps on four sides, and on that can be seen, facing the sea, the statue of a king seated on a horse with his crown and sceptre, all moulded in copper. On the right side there are statues of a horse and a few soldiers built in granite. On the left there is the statue of an elephant and right in front, just a little below, there is a ship moulded in copper. On the last step of this unique royal monument are erected gilded iron railings all around.

The houses on both sides of the road near the square are the new ones built in the place of houses destroyed during an earthquake in Lisbon. The new buildings have been constructed in a row in Italian style. The richest merchants of the city live here. On the sea coast of this city one can see three fortresses, and also another at the centre. In this fortress at the centre, boarding and lodging facilities are given to several kinds of tradesmen and labourers. Among them are carpenters, smiths and a variety of other craftsmen. There are here buildings to store the cannons, and also places where wheat may be stored for use in days of dearth. In various places within the fortress, provisions necessary for human living are preserved. In fact these cells had been designed and built in such a way as to meet all such needs. And there are palaces, towers and mansions where venerable citizens of the city called Fidalgomar live.

The church buildings in the city have greater magnitude and splendour than all such other buildings anywhere else in Europe except Rome. Earlier in order to cater to the spiritual needs of the faithful as in other great cities of Europe, in

Lisbon too there were canonists and cardinals. The great grandfather of the present queen Domyovam V enhanced the ecclesiastical status of the country out of his devotion to ecclesiastical matters as well as for the expansion and prestige of the country and for the glory of God. The king decided that, just as in Rome there were the Pope, the cardinals, the monseigneurs and canonists, there should be ecclesiastical dignitaries of the same authority and status in Lisbon also. He made the Metropolitan of Lisbon, the Patriarch of Lisbon. Appointing twenty-four principals, two monseigneurs, canonists and many other ecclesiastical assistants, he added to the greatness and magnificence of the church in Portugal. Each ecclesiastical office fetched its own emoluments according to its rank and file. The Cardinal Patriarch was paid by the church an annuity of a hundred thousand *karsad* and an additional amount of forty thousand *karsad* from the exchequer. Every principal was given an annual salary of 12000 *Karsad*, every monseigneur 4000 *karsad* and, every cononist—two thousand and five hundred *karsad*. A *karsad* is equivalent to twenty-four *panams*. The scale of pay is according to the order of the office. This system is without parallel and elicits our admiration. There are many such things here that win our respect.

Though there are palaces built in different areas in the city, the king resides, for most of the time, in the palace called *Ayuda* which is at the southern end. Just as we have in our principalities such titles as Kaimal, Panikkar and Menon indicative of social status, in Europe also people of the upper class have such titles as Duke, Count, Viscount, and Marquis. Since King Domyuse did not have any sons, his eldest daughter Donna Maria Francesca became queen. She is the present sovereign of Portugal. As soon as she assumed office, for purpose of administration, she created four departments, and appointed four persons to be in charge. She entrusted Viscount de Pondo de Lima with the rule of Portuguese territories in Europe and deputed Martin de Mel to manage the affairs relating to India, America and such countries beyond the sea. The responsibility of dealing with the affairs of Europe was given to Ira Dessa and the financial responsibility as a whole to Marquis Angela. Officers generally known as Bergadors, administrators, officers and even judges work under these four heads of departments.

I have not studied much about the law or the edicts of Portugal, nor have such things anything to do with our present purpose. So I don't write about them. It is said that the population of the city is four hundred thousand. The queen, her royal consort and the members of the royal households stay in five different palaces in the course of a year, in *Ayuda* palace in the city, in *Khelusa* a little outside the city, in *Salveterra* and in *Sumora*.

As mentioned earlier, after we came to the city, we were accommodated in St. Sambert monastery. That day itself a Goan priest Keithonos, who happened to be in town, came and saw us. He asked us certain questions; he wanted to know from which country we had come, where we were going, and what exactly was the mission of our journey.

The Nuncio and Joseph Malpan wrote to the Holy Father that on our way to Rome we had come up to Lisbon. When we asked the Nuncio for permission to celebrate the mass, the Nuncio said that he would present the request to the Patriarch and that we could celebrate the Mass here. Four days later, the Nuncio spoke to the Patriarch about us. Accordingly we sought an audience with the Patriarch. The sentinels told us that the Patriarch would not see us that day. But the Patriarch in his chamber who happened to hear it, at once remembered the appointment he had given us. Soon he came to the door and took us in. He granted us permission to celebrate the Mass in any church in Lisbon. When he learnt that our liturgy was in Syriac, he told us to go there one day when it was convenient and celebrate the Mass in Syriac in his palace, and he gave us a dignified farewell.

From *Vārthamanapusthakam*, 18th century

Tr. by K.M. Tharakan

# Medieval Manipuri Literature

## The Structure of the Great Search

ANONYMOUS

*Thirel Layat* (The Structure of the Great Search, 13th-14th century) is a legendary account of creation right from the Hayichak of Satya Yuga onwards, with King Kangba as the first ruler. It represents the world of spirits and men in interplay, and does not correspond exactly to the Hindu account of creation. The work is anonymous.

Having announced that there would be peace all over the land, he died. Ningthoujam Kyamba, the divine scholar, communicated the detailed news to King Khagemba. "O King, listen to this news from your forefather. This earth has a beginning and an end in creation. It is a strange creation not known to people. I shall give the details about the deities and the spirits later on. There reigned in Hayichak (100000 B.C.) King Kangba with Queen Kangkhan. The genealogy stands as follows. Queen Kangkhan gave birth to Laithong Ningthounga, Leiyou Nongoibi to King Konghgaba, Nongyaikhu to King Tari, Queen Tanu to Khamlang Phaaba, Tarang Khoinsu to Nongdam Hanba, Tarangsu to Akaaba, Mallang Humoibi to King Tarangba, Katenubi to Augaar, Yaisna Yaikubi to Tanoungang, Nongsaabi to Tanouchi, Leikhom Taobi to Kaaklensi, Nongkaatu to King Meirongba, Simaring Nongkaabi to Leithong Khang, Thaap Lou Maring Tingbi to King Korouhanba. Then reigned Sanamahi for 1900 years over the Seven Sacred Spots. The land was called Leitaang-Kaangoipung. Animal meat was found hanging, handfuls of rice were found. The carriage with wood moved automatically. The same speech was shared by fishes, animals and men. Thereafter during the age of Khunungchak, Poirei Leisangthou Ahanba reigned under the style of Pongba Tarama. Thodu Chengcha Nungkhambi of the underground was called Pangthanglen Poughanba. Tharom Leimites gave birth to King Chengngaaba, Imoinu gave birth to Khoma, Yongnga, Kaksaa Wantaa, Hepu Kangchikpa, Ngangcheng and Letakpa; Chaodam Shaangbi to Miraaba, Kurum Leinaidabi to Nangphang Maharaba, Taobiroinae to Chingyai Khumdaba, Nongyai Chari oubi to Chaoba Mapal Thaba, Pisinus to Heirongngang, Nangsabi to Ngangsengseng, Pisin Khombi to Ngaanba Naha and Leikoi, Leichinknu to Nongdamlen, Hainu to Kurumba, Laahainu to Kuru Saanaiba, Leipubi to Leiba Naha, Ahumunu to

TaoHuning, Khing Khing Langsabi to Numu Kaangba, Ahongnu to Nunghairang, Kainumlangbi to Leitaangla, Kokcha Laicha to Ikbei Thangkari Lairen Pongsibanba, Yugin Khombi to Korou Nongka Pamba, Leranu to Khamlangba, Pisaatao to Leihing Ngaanba, Khongaasu to Kerphaba, Ngangoinu to Taibang Chaamba, Ngaarasu to Maphong and Ningthoubi to King Apaamba. By that time, the god of the South, Laiyingthoy Khaana Chaoba, was called Kaasa Kurumba Leipuba. He reigned for 1900 years.

*Thirel Layat*, 13th-14th century

*Tr.* by E. Nilakanta Singh

## An Account of Goddess Phouoibi

ANONYMOUS

*Phouoibi Warol* (An Account of Goddess Phouoibi) is an anonymous work of the 13th-14th century. The goddess of paddy is in love with various persons by turn. She is fickle in character. She corresponds to Goddess Lakshmi.

Where did goddess Phouoibi go? She went to the house of Akongjamba of Moirang, son of Thoidingjam. Ningolbi Akongjamba had gone for hunting. Goddess Tampha met Thoidingjam Ningolbi and addressed her: "O Ningolbi, the sun is setting and may I take shelter at the phunga lairu of your house?" She refused, stating that she need not come to her house as there were a lot of dogs and cocks. The goddess proposed her cowshed for her shelter but she again said no, as there were many cows and pigs. The goddess Phouoibi then requested her for the courtyard, which was again refused on the ground that it was the path of the returning cows and she physically drove her away. But the goddess ultimately slept at the corridor outside the house. When the day broke, the goddess addressed her thus: "O Thoidingjam Ningolbi, spread your mats over the courtyard." Heaps of paddy were collected there and the goddess left the place with blessings for her homestead. Thoidingjam Chanu Ningolbi recognized the goddess afterwards and repented her action. Her son, Akongjamba, also returned home after the hunting expedition. She informed him that despite her refusal, goddess Phouoibi insisted strongly and took shelter in the side corridor of the house. Akongjamba lamented over the non-recognition of her by his mother and requested his friend, Paa Sayang, to search for her.

*Phouoibi Warol*, 13th-14th century

*Tr.* by E. Nilakanta Singh

## The Universal Mother

ANONYMOUS

*Leimarel Mingkhei* (13th-14th century) is an account of Leimarel or the Universal Mother by an anonymous writer. She is omnipotent and omniscient and is love

personified. She represents the Tantric tradition in Manipuri culture.

O Goddess, creator of all worlds,  
being the root of all,  
representing the male species,  
and also the female ones,  
having the hairs locked on the top  
and also bound on the back.

You have no mother and also no father;  
you are self-born,  
appearing like a mushroom growth  
beyond the birth and death of Man,  
acting like a string for necklace,  
having control over Death,  
and being the origin of the World.  
You are like the humming bee,  
bestowing grace in equal measure;  
and also the warrior goddess  
and the queen of all the animals,  
being omniscient  
and facing the ten directions  
and seeing all,  
having more hands,  
holding in each an instrument  
feared by all the gods.

Your body exceeds all,  
having spiritual dimensions.  
You sit on the top of the sky,  
carrying the wind with you  
and controlling the entire atmosphere.  
You are endless, seated inside the Jar,  
silent and having many hands,  
controlling the entire earth  
in all possible details.

You are unconquerable in war,  
becoming the leader of the forces,  
with your invincible arms  
and swords dancing like lightning  
and throwing spears like missiles  
destroying all the enemies  
who can't stand before you,



and watching all the battles  
with faces reddened,  
holding the net for all  
with the parasols above.

*Leimarel Mingkhei*, 13th-14th century

Tr. by E. Nilakanta Singh

## The Origin of Hills

ANONYMOUS

*Chinglon Laihuni* (13th-14th century), by an anonymous writer, is an account of the various hills of Manipur, indicating where the deities reside and the style of worship associated with each deity and the blessings to be derived therefrom.

Now I shall say something about the hill Chinga. To the east of Chinga lies God Nongpok Mahadeva. Above it remain seven goddesses. A rare diamond is embedded there. A pole stands on the top of the hill. There is a white stone—the seat of Goddess Panthoibi. There is also an iron stick. A stone stands on the leaden trap set by Goddess Chinga. It stands six cubits high. There is another pole also on the peak. A watery pond lies to the east. On the top of the hill stands the house consecrated to lord Thangjing. There stand twelve glass pillars. Each is six cubits in length and breadth. It is situated to the west. Both the ways to the cloud and the earth are being shut. The two-sided poles of the people and of the king remain fixed. There is not much distance between the two poles. To the east of the area remain three Puranas left by the seven gurus being embedded four cubits in depth. Nearby remain the golden sword and shield belonging to Lord Thangjing. There are also guru's articles—a golden wrapper and a golden stick, a golden pipe. These are embedded six cubits and six inches deep. The measurement is wider in the west. The eastern door is shut and the nearby passage is also blocked. There stand both the horned sticks belonging to the public and the king close to each other. To the west there lie the puranas left by the seven gurus embedded four cubits in depth. Near it stand the golden sword and shield of Lord Thangjing. There are also the golden stick, golden shawl, golden pipe, materials for the earth and the heavier are a cloth seat, two shawls, a white curtain, a seat, five sets of bananas, five tamols, two banana rolls, two iron slippers, a knife, an iron piece, holders of cooking pots, an iron receptacle, one *kaptu kaplen*, a bunch of iron filings, a hammer, five bamboo pieces, five candle sticks, five flags, two *sarengs* (fish), three small fish, three small pots, pieces of paddy, *atta*, spices, ginger, a small earthen plate, scented sticks, coins numbering eight. The name of the deity is Arangchi.

*Chinglon Laihuni*, 13th-14th century

Tr. by E. Nilakanta Singh

## The Thanga Range of Hills

ANONYMOUS

*Thanga Iration Chingoiba* (The Thanga Range of Hills, 13th-14th century), by an anonymous author, gives the legendary origin of the hill Thanga near the lake Loktak and the particular way of worship there. This is Tantric in character.

Humble salutation to Lord Immortal. Something about the Thanga range of hills.

The stones, starting from the lake Lamlen, reach the lake Pumlen. These arrive at last at lake Loktak in a place called Shoiku. There are 12 ranges of hills, with the title, Chinglong Chao.

From Patsoi arrives Haoseng hill.

From Irumbi comes Mukalo. At the entry of the sword Yaioiba into the fishing trap of Khuyon Khangkharungba the sword was named *Akhangba*. The sword (*Thang*) came upon the trap and hence the name, Thanga. The top of the hill lies northward, and the valley of the range lies southward. The head of one meets the tail of another. At the meeting place the court of Thanga was built. The two holes jutting out represent the hood, which lies in front of Khwairakpam area. The hood catches hold of the front. The materials for propitiation would be the cooking of a white crane at the dead of the night and offering of it in an iron tray enveloped in *khengla* leaves. Three sticks of white sugarcane have got to be planted crosswise with the prayers: O Lord Almighty and Great One, save us, protect us. Eat the remnants of the materials offered. After that is over, seven persons have to dig beyond and place the earth being enveloped with *khengla* leaves five times, with the song, *He Thoubu*. This would bring longevity to the king, peace and prosperity to the land and long life to the old. This has got to be done in winter, on a Saturday.

*Thanga Iration Chingoiba*, 13th-14th century

Tr. by E. Nilakanta Singh

## The Nongmaijing Hills

ANONYMOUS

*Nongmaijing Chingoirol* (13th-14th century) is a work of anonymous authorship which, besides giving an account of the origin and growth of the Nongmaijing range of hills situated to the east of the valley, is linked to the life of historical kings also.

The account of naming *Chingkhei* starts with the offering of his daughter, Tampha Wangamlon, by King Noimai Thourwanthaba, also entitled Lairen Ten Long Tekpa Wakaodaba to Khuman King Adom Punsiba. His daughter

complained thus: "O father King Thouwanthaba, I am given to far-off Khuman place and you would forget me. What to do with this dowry of a short-tailed bull and a servant, Shamsang by name? The area of Khuman is indeed far. Offer to me the paddy land to the north, the sweet Chingkhei along with the surrounding hillock." The king replied: "O my daughter, there are no big trees in this area, no additional trees also. Take the luxuriant hill on the Mantek." At this, Atonba of Chaklai Phandou intervened: "O King, please do not offer this Chingkhei. This king of the Khuman tribe is greedy after land. Afterwards, crossing the boundaries of Waithou Khampat, Chingkhram Chaopok, Mutlou Nganglon, Tetna Langyam, Wankha Laitoi, Nungoi-Nungou, he would claim the entire area of Chingkhra as the land of his forefathers." In response to this warning, the king addressed his daughter, getting married to Khuman king and said: "There are only dates growing in the Chingkhei land. What to do with that? O daughter Tampha, Kainou Chingkhei Thanbi should be your name henceforth. Your husband's name may be called Thoukham Ching, this Atouba, son of Khaba Laithangcha Chaklai Phandon." This land of Chingkhei, this sweet land is such an area where groves persist, dates and reeds blossom, the speed of the running animals cannot reach the boundary, where dogs cannot cross the limit and where animals play and jump under the glorious sun, this sweet land called Chingkhei.

*Nongmaijing Chingoirol*, 13th-14th century

Tr. by E. Nilakanta Singh

## The Langol Hills

ANONYMOUS

*Langol Chingoiiba* (13th-14th century) is an anonymous work which gives the names of the various areas in the Langol range of hills situated in the north-west of Imphal city. The names are still retained. The account is partly legendary and partly historical.

To the side of the hill, Tampha Panthoibi, while meeting Lord Laijengthou, would be seen by Inu Teknga, her mother-in-law. There is something wrong with the hillock and hence the name, Chingnung Shoi. She was incarnated as the deity carrying away the human soul. Hence the title, Khamnung Khong.

At the other range, Panthoibi was incarnated as Goddess Laikamabi and growing up she took shelter in the hillock under a roaming sky. Hence the title, Nongta Thup.

At another range, Lady Lainaotabi's son, Ninghan Shihanba, while returning to the Maram range of hills as a boy, built his own house. It was called Naha Khuman ling hill. It was his abode. The stream running inside repre-

sents the meeting of Khamchikon Haiheiba and Aman Khambi Thanthokpham. The boy Ninghan Shibanba, while entering the rivulet in the company of Lengnaokhombi, his sweetheart, found himself as unadorned and both underwent change in their names. Hence the name, Shitabung-Tabung.

The rivulet represents the place where cows are herded. Its mother is Laioi lok. Tampha Panthoibi appeared as a child dressed upto the navel and hence the title, Nawa Khoidom Pat.

At another lake, created by Tubu and guarded by Leipu, stands nearby the hill with bushes, reeds and plants. The forest god strikes it somehow and hence the title, Lambu theng.

*Langol Chingoiba*, 13th-14th century

Tr. by E. Nilakanta Singh

## A Court Chronicle

ANONYMOUS

*Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba*, a court chronicle of Moirang (a one-time princely state ruled by one of the seven clans of Manipur), is of considerable import. It records among others the powers and might of the kings who reigned in Moirang, the admirable qualities of the queens, and the wars between Moirang and Khuman and Meitei kingdoms. It also gives accounts of the matrimonial alliances among various princesses of Moirang and other neighbouring clans.

The book was originally written in old Manipuri script by an unknown author, but it was edited and transliterated into Bengali script in 1982 by the late O. Bhogeshwar Singh.

The following is a passage covering pages 75-77:

When Khuchup Cheimiyang, the warrior of Moirang was killed in Sharung village, his chopped-off head was hung on the lofty branch of a tree. Nearby that area a group of Khumujam girls came to collect banana leaves, as it happened. On seeing them the spirit of the slain warrior flying in the sky invisible spoke thus: Sweet damsels, plodding homewards! Would you show your mercy to me by lending your ears? I, the warrior of Moirang, having been killed in Sharung village, my soul lies hanging on the branch of a tree by a farm-house in the paddy field. How much I undergo suffering during downpours and in the heat of the sun, I will let you know in your dream the same night as you reach my fatherland Kege. O King of Moirang, Hepu Sana Rakhuwa, know, then, the reason why your dynasty does not grow, and why you are eclipsed by a cloud of inertia and melancholy is that the bamboo grove planted by Khuyon Lokloulempa has been jostled by the boar and bull

almost to the extent of its being in a state of complete destruction. Besides this, it also results in the reign of solitude and lethargy in the household of Khuyon Lokloulempa. Lack of men makes life barren followed by scarcity of rice and vegetables. This state of barrenness and boredom has already reduced the orphan Khuyon Haoba, son of Khuyon Khunthoulempa, to destitution. To put all this to an end, let the bamboo grove be kept clean so that new bamboo shoots can sprout. The task of cleaning the grove must be entrusted to Haoba. That will bring about prosperity and happiness in place of suffering and destitution. The dream message so given having been heard by King Hepu Sana Rakhuwa, now it was he who summoned his courtiers to the royal court to fully appraise them of what had been told in his dream.

From *Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba*, 16th-17th century Tr. by M. Mani Meitei

## Creation of Heaven and Earth

ANONYMOUS

*Leithak Leikharol*, believed to have been written by some unknown author during the time of King Pakhangba who reigned in Kangleipak (now Manipur) for 120 years (AD 33-154) with some possible additions during the time of King Khagemba (1597-1652), is a book dealing with the creation of heaven and earth, followed by human history and civilization. It is a sacred book of the Meitei containing ancient Meitei rites, beliefs and mantras. The importance of the book lies in the fact that it unravels a great deal of Meitei culture, and it remains a storehouse of the lore of the Meiteis.

The book was transliterated by Yengkhom Bhagya Singh from the old Manipuri script into Bengali script in 1967. The present translation covers pages 9-10 :

Now to tell about something. The Almighty God, to create the world, then summons Atingkok Sidaba to go down with Atiya Sidaba so as to start the creation of the world. Atingkok Sidaba who has been ordered to accomplish a task is known as *Asiba* (one who carries out a task at the behest of somebody). Atingkok Sidaba now comes down with Atiya Sidaba and calls Taopi Loinai (Nature), who appears in the form of a black stone on the surface of the vast emptiness. Atingkok Sidaba settles on the stone under the name of Ningthou Maharaba. When they two are together, they sing a song of union: "*Nungka leite nung leite nungleisan leite/Sahan han, kha nungkarei nungkarei/Laireimagi tinlikhok laiyingthougi tinlikak.*" Atingkok Guru Sidaba's in-charge is Atiya Sidaba. Atiya Sidaba is cloud. Taopi Loinai's in-charge is Atinga. Atinga is the wind. When they have an in-charge each, their song is "*pitareng pitareng karsang sangchang laichang sampit sampit.*"

When Atingkok Guru Sidaba and Taobi Loinai are united they are called "Hum Sangpumlen Chiritkhikhaba". Taobi Loinai gives birth to Ongthi. He too is Asiba. Now water has nine names: Ong chiri, Ong chikhom, Ong chiwak, Ong charit, Ong chithok, Ong chisa, Ong unlari, Ong Chithum. Asiba is "A". Then fire is produced. And fire is Konchin Tingthokpa. Fire is known by these names: Ong meimi mutsang, Ong tarang ngang, Ong ngantuhing, Ong ngantungang, Ong sangtareng, Ong kom nupi, Ong meihingsang, Ong mittarang, Ong sangnupi. These nine names collectively mean Konchin Tingthokpa.

From *Leithak Leikharol*, 16th-17th century

Tr. by M. Mani Meitei

## The God of Death

ANONYMOUS

The book *Nungban Pombi Luwaoba* narrates the legendary story of Nungban Pombi Luwaoba who got back successfully the life of his wife from the hands of the king of Death. Pombi Luwaoba loved his wife so much that when she died he prevented the messengers of the King of Death from taking her to Hades. On knowing that she had died, the God of Death sent his messengers to claim her. But her husband challenged the messengers one after another and defeated them in wrestling and kept them under the weight of heavy boulders. Afterwards the King of Death came down to carry her away. This time Pombi Luwaoba did not challenge the god but prayed to him to restore life to her. The God took pity on him and granted his prayer. According to some scholars this story is reminiscent of the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice.

Fear overcame Nungban Pombi Luwaoba on seeing the powerful manifestation of the God. The man belonging to the principality of Luwang, in the fearful presence of the God, asked Him with sinister design: "Who are you appearing in all brightness in my courtyard?" The God of Hades answered: "I am the King of Death. Why did you place my two subordinates exposed to sun and shower posing yourself as the victor? Come out, O Luwang, let us fight. Let the earth and the sky be the witnesses, let your land Koubru also be the witness, my wife Leima Leinaotabi was sent along with my younger brother Poeireiton with provision of raw and cooked food in items of hundreds to make the seven *salais* or principalities prosperous. How could the lady who was adopted by the lord Koubru become your wife? O Luwang, you are a liar, don't go back and run away." After this, Nungban Pombi Luwaoba came out and, folding his hands, saluted the god, prostrating himself on the ground.

*Nungban Pombi Luwaoba*, 16th-17th century

Tr. by L. Damodar Singh

## A Sacred Book (1)

ANONYMOUS

*Sanamahi Phankhong* is a characteristic old Meitei *puya* (sacred book) originally written in old Meitei script with no author to ascribe to. The book deals with the mode of prayer to be made when Sanamahi and Leimarel are to be worshipped. The god and goddess are worshipped for peace and prosperity. But worshipping them requires a number of ritual things. What these things are the book briefly discusses. The book was transliterated by Naorem Amuyaima Singh (Pandit Achouba) in 1981. Given below is the translation of pages 5-6 :

Then the soul assumes its form. The eye takes on the form of Guru. The organ called mouth has two functions, inhaling and exhaling. Its shape is round, and from inside that same form appears. And how it looks like I will tell: I am the divine figure seen by King Khagemba and his queen as though the image is seen in a mirror. Like that see my vision. Should you see that vision, then know yourself that you know yourself.

Now the universe spreads without irregularity where he becomes God, the Creator. The place where he makes his abode is nightless. Sanamahi turns into dew and he shapes himself into Atingkok. When asked he replies that his mother is Leimarel and is the son of emptiness. They say that I am a product of semen. Who is my father? The answer is he is a human. When three elements, nothingness, sperm and golden liquid get merged in Leimarel Sidabi, then floats the human form in the watery substance as the fish called Ngarel rolls in water. Know then, that becomes the seed of life. Here is a message for all living beings. O, God! you are the giver of all, food, dress and wealth. You are Keirungba (one who is in-charge of granary), Hanjaba Hidang (a title given to a nobleman) and *Pukhran Nongthon* (a great title.) Your name is "Me, He, Hung, Huum, Hung, He, He, Chong, Chap, Chap, Chap, Chap". These names are to be chanted. The materials needed are: seven blades of *hup* (a kind of grass), five blades of *tingthou* (a kind of small grass), a bunch of bananas ending with odd number, a burning lamp. The day for the prayer should be a full-moon day. And when prayer is said one should turn one's face towards the south-west. Then the names of the god are to be chanted three times. Full meditation is needed when these things are observed. These are the golden words. The poor become rich and prosperous once these rites are strictly maintained. Believe it firmly for it is a truth that knows no change. If prayer is done with full faith he will reveal himself like a flash of lightning, and his image will be seen as though falling in a mirror. And his voice will be also heard.

## A Sacred Book (2)

ANONYMOUS

*Pakhangba Nongkarol* is a pretty old Meitei *puya* (sacred book) which accounts for the Meitei kings who reigned in Kangleipak in the earliest periods of human civilization. These kings were endowed with divine qualities so much so that they were all believed to be divine incarnations who died either naturally at the ripe age or at will when they wished to serve God earlier than their natural end. It was transliterated from the original Meitei script into Bengali script by Nongthonbamacha Angou. As usual the original MS bears no name of the author and no year in which it was written.

*Nabudhou Tubi Yoinongda* Nongda Lairen Pakhangba (the ancestral god... Pakhangba), you are mighty in your power and can change your form one thousand times as subtle as the flashing movements of a sword in action. Your divine virtues, since you are the master of heaven, hell and earth, are not known to many gods. This has inspired me to praise your precious qualities. After the creation of the earth you ascended and made the sun your home. Then as you decided to come into the earth as a human being, you were brought down by Taoroinai and received by Leimarel in the form of a round gem. When Leimarel gave birth to you nobody ever believed that you were the god in human form nor did others know who your father was. You became a human with human voice, human eyes and so on. For this reason, that is, your transformation into a human being the place where you were born was called Mira Pongthoklam. O king of gods! you came downstream of the Kongba river on a bamboo raft. You found Laisna, the beautiful girl who came from the land of gods with Leinung Thongarel, the god of death, fishing. Attracted by the beauty of Laisna you expressed your irresistible desire to Laisna by touching her hand. It was a whole-hearted greeting first for other things to follow soon

From *Pakhangba Nongkarol*, c. 17th century

Tr. by M. Mani Meitei

## Invocation

ANONYMOUS

Placed in the closing decade of the 17th century but written in archaic Manipuri, *Panthoibi Khongoon* describes how Panthoibi was given in marriage to a son of the chief of Kanglei principality. But she illicitly fell in love with Nongpok. They eloped to the Nongmaijing Hills, the abode of Nongpok who is believed to be Shiva while Panthoibi is taken as Parvati. Later, she was worshipped as a goddess. People believed she had many divine attributes. She is taken as the greatest of



the goddesses, the source of all mortals, the giver of life. The book throws much light on the tradition and culture of Manipur, apart from having literary qualities. The book begins with an invocation to the goddess.

Emerging out of the body of the Guru, the Lord, the focal converging of all, O Panthoibi, high as the sky, your splendour shining from afar, the source of all life as spread by all the gods, the goddess of all people though you are divine, prime of all the deities, deign to hark!

The support of all in times of adversity like the wall blocking the flow of water in the hills where crops are grown, the prop of persons passing over difficult bridges, an indispensable element in the creation of man, the head of all growing youths, friend of all, O listen !

The one who can unite together all mortals like a chord that strings the ornaments, who keeps together the people and the king in unity, the dispenser of birth and death of all mortals, the meeting point of all beings, the goddess of salt, the dispenser of providence of all, we fall at your feet with obeisance.

Always associated with mortals, the one to whom nobody can give any hindrance, who strides with head held high, splendid as the chain dropped from heaven, who has nobody as parents and relatives, the root of creation, immortal and boundless in fame, we sing your glory.

Your great qualities, your activities which face manifold difficulties, we shall describe and praise your high status.

You are like a princess, unparalleled among the goddesses, the divinity of the hills, descended from afar and the sky; we pray to you with all humility folding our hands.

Lady of the Meiteis, kind and catholic, never shy of giving life, never taking sides, mother of the kings, daughter of the Fire king, giver of victory, source of all strength, swift as the movement of the sword, speedy as lightning, helper of warriors, lady of the rice, giver of food and wealth, healthy forever, constant giver of long life, one who knows the secret as the spirit medium without opening the lock and unwinding the knot, busy in carrying out many duties, bestow on us your kindness as sweet as the honey and as smooth as anchoring boats in a harbour, be kind to give us the voice as that of the metal as eloquent in sound as the *kartal*, that is cymbal, the *poong*, that is the drum which produces a profound sound and the authentic language of old tradition.

O divine one! be kind not to create any disturbance. At your golden feet your singer shall bind and maintain the tradition of our forefathers and the younger generations together as by the breastmilk they share from their parents.

And united as the pieces of clothes stitched together we pay our homage to you!

## The Story of Pitanga

ANONYMOUS

*Naothingkhong Phamban Kaba* narrates how a prince of the Ningthouja principality of the 7th century, after several vicissitudes of life, finally ascended to the throne under the name Naothingkhong. He was in love with Pitanga, the daughter of the chief of Sheloi Langmei; a region to the east of Manipur. The Ningthoujas and the Shelois were bitter enemies. When the Sheloi people surrounded the house of Pitanga to kill the prince who was inside the house, the Sheloi princess made him escape with a clever stratagem. When the prince became the king of the Meiteis, the daughter of the Sheloi chief went to the royal residence but found him with another lady as the queen. She died there broken-hearted and became a spirit.

When Hongnemyoi Khunjao became the king of the Meiteis, dispensing social justice, and peace and prosperity prevailed in the kingdom. His former beloved wife Pitanga, the daughter of the chief of Sheloi Langmei, who was languishing for love casting longing eyes at the sky since their separation and waiting for days together to unite with him, heard that the prince had become the king of the Meiteis. When she noticed the apparel tied in a knot by her husband, the prince still remaining intact, she hung her head in remorse rubbing her toes on the ground. Since the days of her girlhood he was the only man whom she met and married. Thinking her husband would not forget the sweet days they passed at Sheloi hills, she slung on her back the basket filled with ginger, vegetables and rice packed with banana leaves and proceeded toward the Meitei kingdom. When she reached the central valley and approached near the royal residence, she put on her best attire and made herself presentable.

But on her entry into the house she found her husband, the Meitei king who was once living with her at Nongmajing, now in his palmy days seated with Keiru Hangbi the Khuman princess on his left, surrounded by his people in the front chamber of the royal house. Addressing her as his unforgettable dear wife who was his soul and mother figure, he welcomed and invited her to sit on his right, declaring that they would together administer the kingdom. She became thoughtful and said, "Ah! My king and husband, what a treatment it is. You forget me so quickly and did not keep the promise made Remember the day when you could escape from Nogmajing with your dear life helped by my secret stratagem when the people had tried to kill you. How can you forget it? Your wife had left her place for good. My position is so unfortunate as that of one having the fruit but no salt for a sauce and vice versa. Your wife has been living at Langmei as dead as dry flowers bereft of freshness. What a heart you possess : Unfortunate as I am, even though I wish to go back home in the Sheloi hills high and bright as the dazzling beams from the sun, I am ashamed of the elders, brothers and

sisters, and the youths of Langmei. I am not going to return. Nor do I have any desire to exist on earth any more." Saying thus she got wounded herself taking her own life in the room. She left her mortal remains and became a deity.

The king who spent his happy days with her in Langmei at Pamung village wept and remained profoundly repentant. Pitanga's spirit pervaded the Langmei hills and forests and made it her dwelling place near the Chinggoi rivulet which runs through the shrubs. Every year at the advent of the Spring when the flaming *chingthrao* flowers blossom on the vast mountain slopes, the king and his people used to take holy bath in the water of the stream there.

From *Naothingkhong Phamban Kaba*, c. 16th century Tr. by L. Damodar Singh

## The Ballad of a Flower

ANONYMOUS

*Konbirei* (Konbirai) is a popular ballad sung by folk-singers of Manipur. Such ballads on different flowers, orchids, etc., which are plenty in Manipur, are sung by folk-singers to the accompaniment of musical instruments. They are sung in two forms—one known as *Pena*, and the other *Khongjom Parba*, depending on the instruments used. These ballads in which inanimate objects are infused with human feelings and sentiments are taken from a book of flowers called *Leirol*. This Book of Flowers containing more than 100 songs on flowers is ascribed to King Charairongba of Manipur also known as Pitambar Singh (1698-1709). Some collections of this manuscript have been published so far which show variations probably due to oral transmission. This translation is based on a printed version of recent times.

What flower is it?  
It's not an earthly flower,  
But one of the land of death.  
The youngest wife  
Of Kamnung Thongaren Ariba,  
Beautifully named Khamnung Yaiding,  
Made a request to her husband:  
"Great lord, I wish to see  
The drama in earthly life."

Her lord said;  
"You should not see  
The drama in earthly life  
Because human beings are without character

And full of poverty  
 And the world is full of lies.  
 If you have to stay there at all  
 You will have to grow in the midst of earthly illusions.  
 Konu, your mind being distracted  
 By bad character  
 Will be an element of your ruin."

Even when Yaiding Konu  
 Heard her lord's advice,  
 She yet wished to see  
 The three dramas of earthly life.  
 She insisted that her lord  
 Allow her to see the earthly drama.  
 When Konu failed to be convinced  
 Thongaremba said:  
 "Well, then, go and see,  
 But ere you leave, learn this:  
 Do you see that flower  
 In the garden of Khamnung?  
 If the white hue of this flower  
 Is turned into black,  
 Let us understand that  
 Your mind has undergone a change  
 And you have deeply  
 Wallowed in undesirable earthly pleasure."

Both swore this way.  
 Yaiding Konu said  
 To her Lord Thongaremba:  
 "I want only to see earthly drama;  
 I will not follow earthly habits;  
 So that this assurance is not forgotten.  
 Let us plant this flower  
 Taking a sapling from Khamnung  
 To the world.  
 To be guarded from oblivion  
 I, your humble wife,  
 Will watch this flower everyday." .  
 Thus arrived the flower into the world.

Khamnung Yaiding planted the flower  
 At the beloved land of Kege,

At Moirang, the land of water,  
 As if apprehensive of  
 The waves of Loktak lake.  
 At this peaceful land  
 Where seven gurus  
 In the likeness of deer  
 Met with their death in concealment;  
 At this place surrounded  
 By Moirang Tashigon,  
 A place of salty spring  
 The place which reverberated  
 The lowing of the immortal cow Langnubi,  
 Full of sprouting greenery  
 And *pulei* growing touching the belly of bests.  
 She is a flower  
 Protected and cared for  
 Under the tall wild reeds.

Thus the flower being planted,  
 She incarnated in human form  
 At the house of Moirang Leikai lakpa  
 And became one of flesh and blood,  
 To be an instrument  
 Of the deity Thangjing in his drama.  
 She fell in love  
 With Shanba Lamganba, an orphan of Moirang.  
 The flower planted by Yaiding Konu  
 Attained growth, became very tall.  
 Her stalk resembles  
 The calf of young girls.  
 The leaves look like  
 The *tem*<sup>1</sup> of mothers who weave.  
 When in bloom, it has  
 Blooms like fingers of pretty girls;  
 When in full bloom  
 In the season of rain  
 The hue is like  
 The blue clouds of impending rain.  
 A flower it is

1. An implement used in handloom weaving.

Well-lamented by lovers  
 That can steal  
 The hearts of girls.  
 From what it had kept  
 Khamnung Thongaren in deceptivity,  
 It derived its name  
 The seasonal flower, the delicate Konbirei.  
 A beautiful flower of Takyel'lake  
 Found in plenty throughout  
 The golden land of the Meiteis:  
 It is Konbirei.

From *Leirol* c. 18th century

Tr. by I.R. Babu Singh

## Moral Lessons

WAHENGBAM MADHABRAM SINGH

*Langlon* (Lāmlon), which is often called the Chanakya sloka of Manipuri, was written by WAHENGBAM MADHABRAM SINGH (Wāhembam Mādhabrām Sinh, 18th century). He was born at Imphal and flourished during the time of Rajarshi Bhagyachandra. *Langlon* is a collection of moral lessons in archaic Manipuri. These moral lessons have relevance to human life and they are pithy, terse and concise, yet very meaningful and full of other ramifications. They show us the way to a meaningful and just life and are guiding principles to erring human life.

Two such lessons are given below:

What follows is an example of the result of the actions one does. In the progeny of four-footed animals, birds, trees, plants, in almost all flowers of different varieties and the young ones bred by fishes, there is no physical and material change. The tree with sweet fruit bears the same sweet fruit and the bitter trees bitter fruit. No change is there in the texture and smell of flowers and no change in the physical features of fishes. We, human beings, are born with changes in appearance, and in mental ability and courage, following the dispensation of god. There are those who are close to royalty, distinguishing themselves by virtue of their own labour and using their talent as ladder, which cannot be copied. Those who are educated by keeping good company rise to a high position, and also there are those who know what had happened in the past and what will happen in the future by use of education as guiding light. There are people who sustain strength from wealth and multitudes of servants. There are people who get the strength to sustain by amassing huge amount of wealth from business and who shine with success among friends by virtue of saving many lives in great encounters. There are also people who exist by telling lies. It is a matter of distinction to produce

beautiful decorative materials to attract the attention of kings by use of skill and expertise. The country is ruled by those who are steadfast in religious devotion. Born though as human beings, those who could not understand correctly and assume divine will as such and is too flighty, take two wives and pass the time in rags. Those who try to catch two fishes at a time, simply cannot catch any and those who attempt to ride two boats simply fall into the water. All such people pass their days not knowing what to do, oblivious of what each one does and it is what is called divine will. A cat that cries often does not take much food; a silent dog consumes pots of rice. (9)

A man who carries on trade on a boat to amass treasure prepares his boat before he is born, when he is inside the womb of his mother, even then not having good company and not paying heed to elders. Those who are uneducated simply lose themselves floundering their boat on banks here and there. They are like those who return home buying broken pieces of glass paying the price of gold, by not knowing how to bargain. Such people are like small crabs that feed on their mother's flesh; they are like woodrots eating the wood they are in, are like white salts consuming the leaves with which it is wrapped, or like rats that cut the clothes which provide them space to breed or like fire that consumes the firewood, its medium, and also burn themselves. (10)

From *Langlon*, 18th century

Tr. by I.R. Babu Singh

## Aphorisms

ANANTARAM ATON YAMBEBA,  
GARIBATIRAM NOMBAL NUNGANG PAMBA

*Charairongba Khungum* (Carāiromba Khungum) is believed to have been written in 1741 by ANANTARAM ATON YAMBEBA (Anantarām Aton Yāmbēbā) and GARIBATIRAM NOMBAL NUNGANG PAMBA (Garibatirām Nombāl Numgām Pāmbā) who were believed to be favourites to King Garibniwaj. It is a book dealing with political and social matters and contains terse and valuable guidelines on these matters. Many of the materials in this book are close to *Hitopadesh* and *Chanakya Slok*. The book is a rare composition of 18th century Manipuri literature. The language used in the book is a mixture of old and modern Manipuri. No details about the two authors are available.

Like thirst, education should be pursued by Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra, the four castes; if no illness would strike, no confinement by disability would come, as if additional longevity would be added, even if years accumulate like hills, the pursuit of the study of the *Shastra* should be done without any murmur of tiredness. (1)

Delay not to be religious and devoted to god, every one who comes out of the womb of mother; Yama, the king of death, is pulling the hair on the top of your head, and those who burn the fire of death are counting you every-day. (2)

Delay not to earn the religious sentiments, the mind being purified by the advice of the gurus in *shastra* and following the advice of *diksha* guru, who has initiated you and who is like a God. (3)

Though a man has plenty of wealth and is a master of several heads of cattle and horses in his shed, though he is a husband of many wives and a master of several big and vast granaries, at the time of death he will not take along with him any of his wealth and riches, except the clothes he wears and covers his body. (4)

Even though wealth and riches protect a man at bad times, even though taking wife takes a care of wealth, only taking care of the body and the soul protects all. (5)

The great *shastras* are what are called the wealth and treasure of man. Yet the immortal soul is the invaluable top. (6)

The great learning from the golden lotus-shaped mouth of the guru is like a gold bar not consumed by fire; it cannot be washed away by water, and unwanted insects do not crowd around it. (7)

No other secret principle other than guru is there. In the three worlds, there is no one equal to Vishnu. (8)

There is no other guru like mother who gives birth and no other god like father. (9)

*Pranab Achiba* is the topmost mantra and *Atiya Shidaba* the highest among all gods. Education is the greatest treasure of all. (10)

Any top place of pilgrimage is not equal to a drop of the water of the Ganges. Of all castes the Brahmin tops the rest. (11)

The king, master of the land, is the topmost among men. The moon is the brightest of all stars and the milky ocean excels all the other seven seas. (12)

There is none braver than the man who is temperate, no other meditation than speaking the truth, and nothing good other than deliverance. (13)

There is nothing more deadly than ill-repute and no other mother like good name. (14)

There is no enemy greater than loss of temper, no greater *ka/* (*kāl*) than mistaken view. Nothing is more harmful than desire. (15)

Nothing brings bad name more than thoughtlessness and undutifulness. (16)



There is no other fire as hot as the swift flight of desire and no poison more harmful than bad intention. (17)

Nothing else is more knotty than the desire of the mind. There is nothing more rewarding than the study of the *shastras*. (18)

Though education and the study of the use of armoury in warfare are started on the same day and initially the study of the latter appears to surpass as fortunate, with age education excels in the same way as the backside of the boat lasts longer. (19)

Speak equally what you feel and think. Insincerity, maliciousness, betraying friends like a giant and speaking ill behind somebody is prohibitive. (20)

Even if the king, the ruler of the land, treats you as an intimate friend, he should not be treated as an equal. If he is so kindly, do not forget even for a moment that his mind should not be trusted. (21)

The dress of the king, the way he takes food, his orders, manners and character, the way he rides a horse, and the style of adorning a flower should not be imitated. (22)

The king of the land, like the evergreen *Ureishang*, is always with new things. He is like a new wave. He should be attended to like a dispenser of the divine wish. (23)

From *Charairongba Khungum*, 18th century

Tr. by I. R. Babu Singh

## Arong Nandakumar

WAHENGBAM MADHABRAM SINGH, MAYENGBAM BRINDAVAN

*Arong Nandakumar* (Arom Nandakumār) is a Manipuri adaptation of the 18th century Jataka tale. It was believed to have been written in 1787 by WAHENGBAM MADHABRAM (Wāhembam Mādhabrām) and MAYENGBAM BRINDAVAN (Mayembam Brndāban) who were helped in the process by Haricharan Wayenba (Haricaran Wāyenbā) and Khelram Wahengba (Khelrām Wahembā). No further details about the authors are available. The novel tells the story of Arong Nandakumar, a poor weaver, son of a widow of Chandpur in Varanasi. It gives the ordeals of his life and tells how, because of his honesty and pious life, he ultimately became the king of Varanasi and lived happily with his widowed mother. The language used in the book is a mixture of old Manipuri with Sanskrit and a few other Indian languages.

In ancient days when the distinguished god Aruba was born as Nandakumar in the land of Varanasi, he took care of the three worlds—the sky, the earth and the underworld with kindness. All denominations of gods spent their time at the golden feet of Arong with gaiety. Lord Brahma and others favoured him all the more. He gave deliverance to man, genius and all kinds

of births to man by distributing the distinguished wealth of *dharmā*. The untold story of the services rendered by the distinguished Arong in every birth, how he made himself affectionate to the poor, how he suffered, how he felt happy and how he incarnated as Nandakumar will be narrated.

In one respect, in the same way as the sun makes its light available in all directions with its ascent on high, he made men happy by teaching them the religious path of godhead. He cared for all living beings as children given birth by himself. He put a stop to all causes that would lead to sinful actions apprehending that *nirvāna*, the distinguished achievement, would not be attained. He put up a ladder that would lead to the attainment of heaven. The distinguished god Arong preached and spread everything that all beings in all births should know and not forget.

He took care of every being, human beings and gods, like a careful hen sitting over eggs to make not even a single egg waste unhatched. To deliver all beings, he cared for them time and again. At all times he felt eager to earn the wealth of all religions. In one birth he left behind his beloved wife and sons and daughters and went away a recluse. In another birth, he gave away his own body and beloved son as alms. Such different births are acknowledged and known to the three worlds and the earth. In another birth, he distributed top jewels, diamonds, wealth and gold. There is no other faith equal to this. At a time when all human beings had to die, he sacrificed his own life representing all. It was like delivering all beings crossing the water at a river *ghat*. In spite of offerings of different kinds of riches and wealth, he felt apprehensive that it would not be able to cross the vast ocean, being engrossed in the net of worldly and earthly illusion. His mind did not know satisfaction. In another birth, he did not forget even for once to make all beings attain the land of god where there was no suffering and illness, the land of the immortal where pleasure reigned supreme, by teaching them the five-fold ways of religious practice, like a mother carrying her child on her back. He took care of all beings like a mother feeding her breast-milk to her small infant day in and day out. He destroyed all those who are degenerated again and again in the same way as big collections of water are dried by taking out the water. All denominations of gods knew his staunch attempt to attain the immortal tree of religion. In every path of faith, he made progress; there was no decline even to the extent of a single morsel. His mind was like mother earth. He did not take back what he once said. This god, who became the incarnation of an age, did not leave behind the natural way of faith to deliver all those who had incarnated in human forms with distinction. He did not allow to remain in the land of god suspicion and doubt by mending and fending everything of the past in the matter of body, soul and speech, in the same way as broken boats are mended. Like a human being who caresses and kisses his affectionate son and daughter sitting on his lap, he did not forget to deliver all beings in all his births using the previous ten births as

boat and the future ten births as oars. He did not give up natural faith in all his births as a god in one birth and as a human being in another, to remain in peace and plenty in the same way as the king of fishes did not leave big water. He remembered, without forgetting, the attempt to erect idols in temples; and in matter of giving alms he did not keep it away from his self. He did not take food, clothe himself to see those who do not get food, who run short of clothes and suffer from mental agonies. Without adorning himself he presented clothes to all and fed them. He cared for everyone, without making them die. Nobody would call these secrets and the mental discipline he prescribed wrong. He tried without distinction for the deliverance of all beings in the three worlds. He did not think of relatives. He was not averse to the poor, the servants and the lowly, and did not care more for the rich and the wealthy. He considered the innumerable beings as one. He did not covet the wealth of anybody. He was not jealous of distinguished personalities. A man of such disposition is called a devotee of god. To see this kind of man-of godly disposition, all beings shower kindness. To accomplish this which is impossible for human beings to do easily as destined by god is written in the pages of divine books. You who are devotees of God, listen carefully to the pleasant story of Nandakumar. The distinguished Nandakumar recapitulated his first birth.

From *Arong Nandakumar*, 18th century

Tr. by I.R. Babu Singh

## Dhananjay, the Devotee of God

PUKHRAMBAM ANANDA

*Dhananjay Laibu Ningba* (18th century) is a fictional work by PUKHRAMBAM ANANDA. The exact date of composition is not known. Dhananjay, younger brother of Puma Deva, king of Ishwa, was married to Bhanu. They had two sons. Dhananjay was driven out by his brother. His wife and sons were taken away by sea-traders. Dhananjay's deep devotion to the gods helps him to get back not only his wife and children but also his kingdom.

All the lords and noblemen of the kingdom of Shabya were sitting round like a galaxy in the skies. In such an assembly there came the Pangan Shangkhlu Likambas, the Muslim merchants, who knelt down with folded hands and said, "O Lords and Noblemen of Shabya, we brought a beautiful maiden, hoping to offer her to the king but those two sons of the washerman had darkened her morale and spoiled her chastity." On listening to it the lords and the noblemen of Shabya quickly gave the king the alarming news of the incident. Suddenly came the king before the court and asked about the interesting story. The Pangan Shangkhlu Likambas saluted the king and prayed,

"Your Excellency, our Honourable Lord of Shabya! For you we brought the most beautiful fairy on earth, hoping she would be the queen of the land. But the two ruffian sons of the washerman had hidden and pirated and darkened her chastity. For this, we pray to your Lordship, what punishment is to be given." On hearing it, the lord of Shabya kingdom announced to the court that he desired to hear about the incident from the boys. Hence, Devanarayan and his younger brother came in front of the king with folded hands. The king was suddenly surprised at the sight of the two boys. "What attractive boys they are! Are they sons of a washerman?" he asked. "There's not a single one as precious as these boys throughout my country". While he was thinking of this, Devanarayan, the elder brother, prostrated before the king with hands folded and said, "My Lord, the woman is none but Leima Bhanu, our own mother. We are the sons of Dhananjoy Laibu Ningba of Ishwa. We were driven out by the king, the elder brother of our father. On the way while crossing a river our father was swallowed by a giant fish and our mother was kidnapped by these merchants. We were also arrested by them and given the charge to watch the box she was in. By chance on a late night we broke the lock and got her out from the imprisonment." On listening to it, the king stopped the boy and pondered awhile. Then he sent for his spiritual guide Dhananjoy, who was to be brought to the royal court on a palanquin in order to decide the case. When Dhananjoy came in, the boy was interrogated anew. Now he knew that the two boys, who were said to be the sons of the washerman, were his own sons, and the woman, brought by the merchants, was his wife, Leima Bhanu. He embraced the two boys and wept together. Then the king sent men along with the ladies of the palace to fetch Leima Bhanu in a palanquin.

Thus after a long separation the couple with their two sons were united again happily. And the merchants, who kidnapped Leima Bhanu, were released, at the request of Dhananjoy, by the king after confiscating the merchandise.

From *Dhananjoy Laibu Ningba*, 18th century

Tr. by R.K. Madhubir Singh

## Chothey Thangwai Pakhangba

ANONYMOUS

*Chothey Thangwai Pakhangba* (18th century) is an account of how the hero from Moirang is on his way to the palace of Shoraren in the land of death and is warned against taking his wife with him.

The following passage describes how they swim across the river and proceed to Shoraren's palace.

Chothey Thangwai Pakhangba was an inhabitant of Moirang. After the completion of his days' work Chothey had followed his path to Heaven. On

his way he found a wide river of water and had to cross it but he could not find any bridge there. At last he found some artisans of Shoraren constructing a bridge over the river.

At the sight of Chothey Thangwai Pakhangba, some of the artisans warned him, "O young Pakhangba of the Kegay Moirang, you're warmly welcomed by our Yoithanglen Namungba Shoraren, our lord. But your spouse, coming with you, will not be allowed to enter the land of death. Hence, you are not to come along with her." Saying this they halted them at the entrance of the bridge. On listening to it Thongnang Loinemba Chanu (Leima Shunulembi) retorted, "O noble artisans of Lord Shoraren, we are both husband and wife like an unsplit bamboo. Why do you so desire to separate us into different pieces?" Uttering this, Chothey Thangwai Pakhangba and Leima Shunulembi swam over the wide river together and followed their aerial journey to Heaven.

On their way, they saw another river as wide as the former. Many artisans were constructing the bridge. Some were working on the frameworks and some on the railings. Chothey Thangwai Pakhangba had started crossing over the bridge. When the artisans saw that he was followed by his wife, one of them said, "Hey, Leima Shunulembi, the better half of Chothey Thangwai Pakhangba, our Lord Shoraren will be in a rage if you come along with your husband." Shouting thus they stopped her from crossing the bridge. Thongnang Loinemba Chanu (Leima Shunulembi) retorted, "O young Kegay Thangwai, my sweetheart! My spouse! Don't you like to accompany me, your poor and tender wife! I, your helpless partner, will be drowned and lost among the tides of the wide river! You look back at me at least for a moment."

Listening to the mournful tidings of his dear one, Chothey Thangwai Pakhangba spoke out, "Shunulembi! Shunulembi! My darling, come along and walk with me. If Lord Shoraren doesn't allow you to enter, I'll prostrate like a kneeling cow and will request His permission to stay with you together." Uttering this he snatched the hands of Shunulembi and crossed over the river and reached the palace of Shoraren.

From *Chothey Thangwai Pakhangba*, 18th century

Tr. by R.K. Madhubir  
Singh

## Sanamanik

WAHENGHAM MADHABAM SINGH

*Sanamanik* (18th century) is an early example of Manipuri prose fiction along with *Dhananjoy Laibu Ningba* and *Arong Nandakumar*.

The following is an extract from this work:

O Lords, the Saviours of the Universe! I bow my head before you all and am praying with innumerable chants. O, Father of my soul, my creator, the

kindred point of knowledge and wisdom, giving me light and opening my eyes, with your affectionate blessings, please take my humble offerings; kneeling down I am, touching your soft and blooming lotus-like palms and praying to you, O King of kings. All my forefathers, all my masters, are gone to heaven by now. To all of them I bow down my head to be forgiven for my sinful mistakes in narrating the fascinating stories of the Kabos.

Long, long ago, there reigned a king at Varanasi. All his time he devoted himself to God, as a poor fellow longs for money and gold. The king had a son. The son was very handsome and well-built with a manly personality. Each and everybody was attracted by him and looked at him with envy. Even the gods felt spellbound at his beauty. This is the story of that attractive prince.

This is the story of the kingdom of Kabos. Yes, the story of Meidingu Loinai Chingthangkomba, who was so courageous and dauntless in war. He was popularly known as Huyen Khamba Shaphaba. During his reign he had shifted his royal palace at Langthaban, a place lying between the Imphal and the Nambul rivers. This place is the navel centre of the Meitrabak. While he was alive there one Wahengbam Madhabam also wrote a story about him, rendering it in another language.

In ancient times, there was a kingdom called Varanasi. In that kingdom there reigned a noble king. Not only by human being but even by the gods he was revered with great affection. Most of his properties were given away as boons to the poor and humble ones and hence he was adored with honour and fame. Throughout his life he devoted his belongings to the welfare of the other people. To think of the good of others was his religion and his way of life. He was the saviour of the poor and hapless people. He was the helping stick for the weak ones. Not only this, he was also the apple of the eyes of the poor and helpless people. He was very handsome and has a noble character. There was no scantiness and want of anything in his kingdom. Being pleased at his nobility and simple nature, God has given him the good fortune of seven princes as his sons. All his seven sons were married to beautiful princesses. His eldest son was given the title of Yubraj, the heir to him. All his seven sons also loved him and gave him full support and cooperation in all administrative affairs. Thus the king ruled the country so happily and without any difficulty.

From *Sanamanik*, 18th century

*Tr. by* R.K. Madhubir Singh

## The Conquest of Shamshok

LAJSHRAM ARONG, YUMNAM ATIVAR

*Shamshok Ngamba* (18th century) is concerned with how the Meitei king Thongnang Mayamba captured the land of Shongshok.

Listen, you universe! It is the story of our courageous hero Thongnang Mayamba (Pamheiba), the Meitei king who had defeated the huge troops of invaders of Awa and seized the lands of Shongshok. The erstwhile king Charairongba, his heavenly incarnated father who conquered and captured upto the Shenbi Tekhao, had kept a promise to have a relation by bethroting Tampha Wangamlon Chakpa Makhao Ngambi his true blue-blooded daughter to the Awas king.

King Chekot Leimaba, the Tangdoi king of the Awas, proclaimed one day; "Hey, Mayangkong and Tungalbca, my two wise and witty courtiers, both of you go to the court of the Meiteis. Pile up a number of ornamental discs, bind the rods of iron and collect the costly clothes. Put it in the Khagi trunk. Then bring and offer it as a tribute to His Excellency, king Charairongba of the Meiteir, our revered uncle".

The order was taken into royal account by Mayangkong and tungalacha, the two lords of the king. They, with sticks in hands, crossed over the land of the Awas and reached the kingdom of the Meitei along with the tributes as a bride price. They stayed at the inn of the errands, known as Lindu Loukhongpat at Kongba Ngachaitel. On the fifth day they entered the palace of the Meitei king and prostrated with immense gratitude. Charairongba, the Meitei king, was sitting on the royal throne which was ornamentally constructed by Naolghongba, his grandfather. Sometimes he was chewing pan and sometimes inhaling the smoke from the hookah. At that moment the two messengers from the Awas were coming into the courtyard. They saluted the king and opened the trunk and displayed the glittering discs, the bundle of iron rods and the enchanting clothes as the tribute to the king, saying: "Your Royal Highness, king of the Meiteis, we bring these gifts from our lord Chekong, king of the Awas. The king sends us to convey a message also to your royal Highness that your beautiful daughter princess Tampha Wangamlon may kindly be ordained to be queen of the king of the Awas. For the royal engagement, a boatful of gold along with the boatmen would be sent on the river Ningthi."

On listening to it, king Charairongba said: "My dear messengers from the Awas, tell king Chekong of the Awas that I won't take his offerings. After all I am the king of the Meitei. I have no scarcity either in gold or in anything else. So I do not need any gold or other wealth. It is but an absurdity. If you, the Awas, want to have a royal relation with me, send back my Tarao people whom Khamral, your king, had seized from the Tarao village. And convey to him this news too that he should repay the expenses of the famine caused by him. If he is willing to accept my proposal, I am ready to betroth Tampha Wangamlon, known as Chakpa Makhao Ngambi, my courageous and beautiful daughter."

With the royal orders of the Meitei king, the two messengers came back by crossing their ranges of rolling hills. Afterwards, they reached the palace

of king Chekong and knelt down before him and conveyed, "O Chekong, our lord, king Charairongba of the Meitei, did not accept the tributes offered by your lordship."

*Shamshok Ngamba*, 18th century

Tr. by R. K. Madhubir Singh

## Arjuna and Babhrubahana

LONGJAM PRASHURAM

*Arjuna and Babhrubahana* (c. 1800 A.D.) narrates the story of Arjuna's sojourn in the kingdom of Babhrubahana accompanying the horse of the Ashwamedha sacrifice. It is taken from *Langoi Shagol Thaba* written by Longjam Prashuram.

After trotting for many hours the horse of the Ashwamedha Sacrifice followed by Arjuna, the archer, along with his soldiers was en route towards the kingdom of Babhrubahana. On seeing the strange beauty of the place, Arjuna asked Hans Dhawaja, the king, who was going along with him: "What is the name of this strange and beautiful place! I have never seen such an enchanting place in my life. My heart is suddenly drenched by all the sights of this place." On listening to the query about the name of the ruling king of the wonderland, Hans Dhawaja, the king, replied: "Hey Arjuna the great, the name of this place is Manipur. The ruler of this kingdom is Babhrubahana. He is one of the most powerful and wisest among his equals; his fame is widespread. Dauntless is he and he sacrifices everything for the poor. Always ready even to give his soul away for the sake of others, he has no rivals in the art of archery and lancing. In any field he fights like Shiva Nongpok Mahadeva. Not a single king could face him in war. All his rivals are paying thousands and thousands of flakes of gold as tribute to him every year. He has three powerful generals in his army staff under the post of Pathi Jagya Kartit. All of them are so courageous and so dauntless in all wars. From this point of view it is really doubtful whether we should try to fight with him. O God, what may our future be! who could ordain! if the horse is caught by Babhrubahana, the king, the ritual sanctity of our sacrifice would be broken into pieces. Is it possible to make a fresh arrangement for another sacrifice?"

While they were talking to each other, there flew down a crow and a vulture together and perched on the top of the crown of Arjuna. All the soldiers were glancing at it and started thinking that *Gandiva*, the precious bow of Arjuna assumed a rebarbative look. All the hearts of soldiers were throbbing with excitement.

While discussing minutely the ill-fated ordeal, the horse was brought into the court of Babhrubahana by his army. The soldiers prostrated before the king and reported to court with folded hands: "O king, our lordship, a beau-



tiful horse of sacrifice had entered into the royal gate today. We caught it and now bring it to your feet for your disposal. A golden emblem is also put on the forehead of the horse. On that plate it is also written that, in the exuberant kingdom of Hastinapur, King Yudishthira has been fasting in order to get a reprieve for the merciless slaughtering of numerous souls of his own clan. Dhananjoy, the great and most skilful brother of the king, was following the horse as incharge. Anyone, who dared enough, could catch the horse and should accept the challenge. And those who could not catch the horse must surrender themselves to the king with huge amounts of tribute." On learning this King Babhrubahana's mind was suddenly filled with unbounded happiness.

From *Langoi Shagol Thaba*, c.1800 A.D. century

Tr. by R.K. Madhubir  
Singh

## Positions

ANONYMOUS

*Phamlon* is a book that reveals the positions occupied by noblemen in the Meitie kings' court from the time of King Pakhangba (who reigned from 33 A.D. to 153 A.D.) to the middle of the nineteenth century. Besides detailing the information about the introduction of these positions during the times of particular kings, the book underscores the conduct and behaviour as sanctioned in the royal court. The book remains an important contribution to the study of Manipuri royal court.

The book was edited by Ningthoukhongjam Khelchandra Singh, and published in 1987. The first four pages of the book are given below:

At the outset let me invoke you, the Creator of all. *Laisra Pham* (the position known as Laisra) comes out of the body of Guru: from His right eye Muwa king issues and from the left eye Laingthou Hanba issues; from His left ear Naokan comes and the right ear produces Mongbahanba; from the right nostril Chakhaba issues and from the left nostril springs Koubaren; Khamlangba comes from the mouth; from his private part Luwang Ningthou flows; and His anus produces Marching.

And yet more can be said. Sunday is a product of Guru's right eye; the left eye produces Monday; Tuesday comes from the right ear and Wednesday from the left; from the right and left nostrils issue Thursday and Friday respectively; Saturday comes out of mouth; from the navel time is produced; Ketu comes from the private part and anus produces Rahu.

Pakhangba's court was adorned with a gem of ten noblemen whose positions were named after nine forest gods as follows: Khurairakpa position was under the name of god Laingthou Hanba. Similarly, Wangkheilakpa

appertained to Mongbahanba; Nongthonba was known as Khamlangba; Pukhranba was under the name Chakhaba; Khwairakpa was called Naokan; Yaiskul Lakpa and Ahallup Lakpa were associated with names of gods Muwa Ningthou and Luwang Punshiba, whereas Hiyangloi Hanjaba and Chongkhanba Hanjaba took the names Marjing and Koubaren.

The Meiteis were divided into four groups according to the different places they settled in. Khurai became the home of the Laipham group; Wangkhei of the Khabam group; Khwai-settlers were the Ahallup group and Yaiskul fell under the Naharup group.

Now, to tell one thing more. Ten Iremthaba kings belonged to the Luwang clan. Ten Thamangthaba kings were from the Sharangleishangthem clan. Ten Lokyaithaba kings were of the Khuman clan. Ten Wangmataba kings were of the Angom clan.

How time was kept round the clock by different clans is as under: A day was divided into eight equal parts, each of which was called a *Yuthak*. The first Yuthak after dusk was measured by the Khaba Nganba clan. The second Yuthak till midnight was taken care of by the Luwang clan. The third Yuthak, from midnight to the completion of the next Yuthak was kept by the Sharang Leishangthem clan. Then the fourth Yuthak, till daybreak, was entrusted to the Haorok Konthou clan. Thus the night time was under the care of these four clans. The first Yuthak after daybreak was kept by the Ningthouja clan. The rest three Yuthaks were kept by the Moirang, the Angom and Khuman clans one after another. Thus the day Yuthaks were maintained by these four clans. The four clans that kept time during night were known as *Tanthong Mayung* (keepers of group of men, whose main duty was to beat drum to indicate time), and the other four who kept time during daytime were known as *Lemthong Maphei* (Khuman clan).

*Positions under Marhan* : Yoirenhanba title was given to the Laipham people (one of the earliest four groups of people in Manipur then known as Kangleipak). Maibahanba title was given to the Khabam group. Only two positions were there.

*Positions (portfolios) under Pakhangba* : Pukhranba title was given to the Laipham people; Nongthonba was reserved for the Khabam Pana (a division of people); and two other positions were Keirungba and Selungba. Thus Pakhangba had four ministers under him.

*Position under Poireiton* : Asheibahanba title was given to the Laipham people. Similarly, Thangsuhamba, Khuheiba Hanjaba and Hijabahanba positions were also reserved for the Laipham group. Altogether six positions were made for his administration.

*Positions under Nongmoinu* : Okranhanba and Asheiba Hanjaba were given to the Laipham group. And Keikranhanba was for the Khabam Pana.



Thus three positions were under Nongmoinu.

*Yoimongma's council of ministers*: Nakpak Hanjaba position was given to the Khabam Pana. Again Nakpak Lakpa position was also given to the same Khabam Pana. The duties of Nakpak and employees in the kings, granary were divided, and offices were set up.

*Yaorei Khunkam's council of ministers*: Iratlangba was given to the Khabam Pana. The office of this minister was built.

*Meidingu Naophangba's council of ministers*: Hiyangloi Hanjaba and Shanglen Lakpa were the two positions reserved for the Laipham Pana; Shanglenlakpa and Chongkhanba were again given to the Khabam Pana. Leichollakpa position was also given to the Laipham Pana.

From *Phamlon*, c. early 19th century

Tr. by M. Mani Meitei

## The Royal Pilgrimage

NABACHAND, HARICHARAN, WAHENGBA MADHABRAM SINGH

*Chingthangkhomba Maharaj Ganga Chatra* written by three scholars, viz. NABACHAND, HARICHARAN, AND WAHENGBA MADHABRAM on the orders of King Labanya Chandra (1798-1800), describes the pilgrimage of King Chingthangkhomba (Jai Singh) of Manipur (1759-1798), father of Labanya Chandra. He was also known as Rajarshi Bhagyachandra as he was very religious. When King Chingthangkhomba came to know of the execution of a Brahmin criminal by some of his officers, he decided to go on a pilgrimage to Vrindaban as an act of atonement, for, it was the belief that no Brahmin, however wicked, could be executed. The king left behind his family, the near and dear ones, handing over the charge of his kingdom to his eldest son Labanya Chandra. Passing through many places of eastern India he expired on the way to Vrindaban at a place called Gambhilapat on the Ganges in October 1798 bringing to a consummation a very great and eventful life. The work throws much light on the religious ethos of the time.

When the queen Shri Bhanumati, the Khuman princess, Shri Devahuti of the Chingakham family, Shri Bhagyabati, the royal singer and all the loving royal maids, Shri Modhuchandra, son of the Meitei king and Senapati of the kingdom and his followers expressed their desire to accompany the king on the journey, the king had advised them repeatedly: "Dear loving ones, it is needless for men and women to exist on this earth though lovingly as useless flower does. The conjugal life into which men and women enter is like *maya* which lies as a hindrance in our way for a better life. Do not fall into despondence. The only way to cross over this vast expanse of *maya* is to dedicate ourselves to the feet of Shri Govindaji, the chief of the gods who is the best boat to carry us across. Pray to Him everyday with undivided atten-

tion. O prince, son of the king, you must become the king and defend the country. Your grandfather, my youngest uncle, the royal Minister, is an old man who knows the secrets of the country. Pay due regard and treatment to him and don't forsake him. Your younger brother, my son, prince Marjit is like a lone mole decorating your visage. Treat him with love and kindness." After counselling thus, the king started on his journey at an auspicious hour of the 20th day of *Wakching*<sup>1</sup> accompanied by a crowd of his people who carried palanquins, money, amidst playing on conch shells, musical instruments, drums and chanting the name of Hari. The loving ladies of the royal palace wailed and cried for their inability to follow their beloved king, unable to think how they could exist without their Lord, the Meitei king whose lovely visage and sweet voice will no longer be seen and heard, filling the whole palace with the noise of their cries.

From *Chingthangkhomba Maharaj Ganga Chatpa*,  
18th century

Tr. by L. Damodar Singh

1. A Manipuri month roughly corresponding to January.

# Medieval Marathi Literature

## Selections

MHAIMBHAT

1

### The Deeds of Lord Chakradhar

The following passages are from the *Lilacharitra* (Lilācaritra, 13th century), a biography in the form of memoirs of Chakradhar (Çakradhar), the founder of the Mahanubhava sect. It was compiled by one of his followers named MHAIMBHAT (Mhāimbhat) in about 1278. The work is divided into three parts: *Ekak*, *Purvardha* and *Uttarardha*, and contains more than a thousand anecdotes of Chakradhar. It is written in simple and lively prose and is a witness to the socio-religious life in Maharashtra during the 13th century. It is also the basic text on which was raised the structure of the philosophical thought of the Mahanubhavas.

1

### Taking over a Dead Body

Once Mahadaise asked the Gosavi, "Where did Changdev Raul go after discarding his body". The Sarvajna said, "O Bai, at that time the son of the Royal Minister of Gujarath had died. Changdev Raul decided to revive it and accept it for himself." "How?" Mahadaise asked. The Sarvajna said, "The Minister's son was suffering from some ailment for a few days. Finally, he died. When his dead body was brought to the cremation ground, Changdev Raul revived it. The covering sheet fluttered a little and he or the dead body started looking around. "Oh, the prince opened his eyes," shouted the people and joyfully started beating drums. But the Minister himself was a wise, discerning, clever man. He could immediately see that he was not the same person. He knew that the Siddhas possessed the power to enter other bodies and use them to satisfy their passion for the royal throne. So he thought, "This must be a similar case". The whole town (however) was decorated with arches and buntings to receive the revived prince. He was clad in silken garments. Then he was taken in a palanquin to the residence of his wife, Kanalarani. Her forehead was dabbed with kumkum as she was no longer a

widow. The Minister too spent a lot. He however thought that some Siddhas were doing this to fulfill their wishes. So he sent his servants to the hills and dales, cliffs and caves, streams and streamlets in the surrounding area to see if some Siddha had dropped his body there. But the search was of no avail. Through his wife, he asked Kamalaisa if her revived husband had made love to her in the same old way or differently. She denied any change in his behaviour with her. That was proof enough to remove his doubt. Then the Sarvajna commented, "Bhai, this person (I) assumed all his characteristics, namely, his initiation into the Gopal-mantra, the habit to take the oath of Gopal and love for the princess and passion for dice-playing. I took over age, form, qualities and attributes, strength and valour, understanding and wisdom—all the ten characteristics were accepted." The Sarvajna said, "Bhai, God accepts all the characteristics of body and soul." The Gosavi then had a son. He lived happily.

From *Lilacharitra*, 13th century

Tr. by S. G. Tulpule

## 2

### Dice-play

The Gosavi lived the life of a householder for some days. A son was born to him. The Gosavi then used to play the game of dice everyday with stakes and usually win. He therefore chose to get defeated and lost a good amount of money. Then the Gosavi departed from there. At the threshold the gamblers said to him, "O you Gosavi, please give us our dues first and then enter inside." The Sarvajna (Chakradhar) replied "I swear by Gopala. I shall not take any food unless I pay you off." The Gosavi then went inside and said to his wife, Kamalaisa, "Bring your ornaments." She asked, "Why?" He said "This person has lost the stakes and assured all the playmates on the oath of Gopala that he would not take any food unless they are paid off." Whereupon Kamalaisa said, "On the very same oath, I will not give you." Then the Gosavi went upstairs and chose to lie down quietly. His mother sent a messenger to him. The Sarvajna told him that he had no appetite. Then the mother came to get him up, but the Gosavi would not move. Then she inquired of Kamalaisa. She told her what had happened. Then his father, the Minister from the palace, came there and inquired if Gosavi had his food. Then he took the Gosavi in his lap and asked him, "Why have you not taken your meal today?" The Gosavi replied, "I lost the stakes and have promised the playmates on the oath of Gopala that I would not take any food until they are paid off." Whereupon the father Minister said, "Whatever I have earned belongs to you, does it not?" Then he saw to it that the bag of money was brought and the dues to the gamblers were paid off. Then the Gosavi took his food.

From *Lilacharitra*, 13th century

Tr. by S.G. Tulpule

## 3

## Protecting a Rabbit

The Gosavi stayed in a certain village. He sat under a tree. A hunter had betted on a rabbit. He whose dogs caught the rabbit would win the bet. The hunters released a rabbit on the road and the dogs were set upon it. Scared, the rabbit ran for its life and sought shelter under the Gosavi's knees. The dogs stood there. Later the hunters followed. The Sarvajna said, "He has sought my shelter." Then they said, "O you, this rabbit is meant for betting. On account of this, stabbing can take place. So we beseech you to let it off." The Sarvajna said, "Look here, does he who seeks shelter of this person ever die." The hunters said, "It means the Gosavi has given him protection." They went away. The Sarvajna said (to the rabbit) "O you Mahatma, go now", saying this he lifted his knees. The rabbit then moved off.

From *Lilacharitra*, 13th century

Tr. by S.G. Tulpule

## 4

## He Instructs Changdevbhat about Recollection

Since they had come from Parameshvarapur<sup>1</sup> Changdevbhat had not gone to his village. So the headmen made a request of the Gosavi<sup>2</sup>: "Lord, Lord, Chango has been gone for a long time. His mother is distressed, Lord."

The Omniscient One<sup>3</sup> said, "Batika<sup>4</sup>, go and meet her."

"Yes, Lord."

Then Changdevbhat set out for his village. The Gosavi accompanied him the first part of the way. The Gosavi placed one holy hand on Changdevbhat's shoulder. Then the Omniscient One said, "Batika, you have gone with me from here to Shriprabhu's place<sup>5</sup>. You have come back along with me from Shriprabhu's place. Now you are going to your village. Will you remember me?"

And Changdevbhat said, "Of course, Lord."

The Omniscient One said, "Batika, you should remember me. You should remember me ten or twenty times (a day). If not five or seven times, you

1. Riddhipur

2. Chakradhar

3. Chakradhar

4. Changdevbhat

5. Riddhipur. Shriprabhu is Gandam Raul or Govindaprabhu, Chakradhar's guru.

should remember me at least two or four times. If not two or four times, you should remember me at least once or twice. But do not let a day go barren."

From *Lilacharitra*, 13th century

Tr. by Anne Feldhaus

5

He Meets Shantibaisem

Shantibaisem was from Vasumati. Her name was Maibaisem. Her husband died. Her son died. What money she had the king (Raul) took away. Her elder daughter, Ekaisem, became a widow. Her younger daughter, Jasamaisem, went mad.

[Jasamaisem's] husband didn't like her. Her parents-in-law didn't like her. Her husband's brother-in-law didn't like her. They sent her away. Maibaisem brought her home to live with her. In this way Maibaisem suffered profound grief.

Some people set off to go to Dvaravati<sup>1</sup>. Maibaisem said, "Now I'll go to Dvaravati. I'll tie one of the girls to my back, I'll tie the other to my front, and then I'll walk into the ocean."

So she set off along with the group of pilgrims who were going to Dvaravati. She came to Pratishthan<sup>2</sup>. Sarangpandit was a relative of hers; he was her nephew. She met him. She expressed her grief. She told him her whole story. "Now I'll go to Dvaravati. I'll tie one of the girls to my back, I'll tie the other to my front, and then I'll walk into the ocean."

Sarangpandit comforted her. Then early the next morning, as she was leaving, Sarangpandit said, "Maibai, if you're going to Dvaravati, go by way of Elapur<sup>3</sup>. Our Gosavi, Shri Changdev Raul<sup>4</sup> is living there. Take *darshan* of him. And your grief will go away. And her madness will go away. Then go to Dvaravati."

She set out immediately, and came to Elapur.

The Gosavi's morning worship had been performed. The Gosavi had gone out for a walk. He had returned from his walk and come back to the monastery. The Gosavi's feet had been washed. Preparations were being made for his worship. All the devotees had come to serve the Gosavi. They were wearing silk and cotton garments. All of them looked exactly like the Gosavi. It was impossible to tell which one was the Gosavi.

1. Riddhipur. Shripabhu is Gandam Raul or Govindaprabhu, Chakradhar's guru.

2. Dvarka

3. Paithan

4. Verul, Ellora



Then the Omniscient One said, "My woman, come here," and he gestured to her with his holy hand. Maibaisem approached him. She prostrated herself to him. She touched his holy feet. She gave him a gold coin as an offering. Then she sat down.

The Omniscient One said, "My woman, where have you come from?"

Maibaisem said, "From Vasumati, Lord." Then she told the Gosavi her whole story. "Lord, my husband died, my son died, the king took away my money and my fields. My elder daughter was widowed. My younger daughter went mad; her in-laws brought her back to live with me.<sup>1</sup> Then I set off for Dvaravati, saying, 'I'll tie one of them to my back, I'll tie the other to my front, and then I'll go into the Gomati.'<sup>2</sup> I reached Pratishtan. There I met my nephew, Sarangpandit. He sent me to the Gosavi. Lord, Lord, my son's hands were just like [yours]; his eyes were just like [yours]; his face was just like [yours];" And she began to cry, "Lord, Lord, he was handsome. There were so many good things about him. he was just like the Gosavi." Thus, recounting his good qualities, she began to cry.

The Omniscient One said, "My woman, don't grieve. Grief is a sin. Grief sends you to hell. If you tie a golden plank to your stomach and enter water, will you be able to swim across, my woman? It will sink. Thus, my woman, do not grieve."

And in this way her grief was taken away.

The Gosavi's feet were washed. Baisem gave her the water from his feet. She poured it on herself and on her [daughter] Jasubaisem. Then his worship service took place. She watched that as well. Then Baisem prepared a plate of food. The Gosavi ate meal. They were given *prasād*. Then she went to her lodgings.

She came to the evening worship service. Again she gave Jasamaisem the water from his feet to drink, and poured some on her head. She watched the worship service. Then she went to her lodgings.

Early next morning she came back. The Omniscient One said, "My woman, did she have any trouble during the night?"

"No, Lord, Lord, it comes into her body twenty times [a day]; it comes thirty times [a day]. Today nothing happened at all, Lord."

The Omniscient One said, "My woman, it won't come now. Now it's gone, my woman."

Her grief went away. The one daughter's madness went away. Then the Omniscient One said, "My woman, the group of pilgrims is setting off for Dvaravati. Now you'll go to Dvaravati, won't you?"

1. *te sasuricam anuni ghatalim*. Earlier the text states that the in-laws sent the youngwoman away, and that Maibaisem herself brought her home: *maibaisim apaleya pasi anilim*.
2. The Gomati is the river that meets the ocean at Dvarka. Until now, Maibaisem and the text have said that she intended to enter the ocean, not the river.

Maibaisen said, "No, Lord. This is Dvaravati for us. We have met our Kanhaiya<sup>1</sup> right here, Lord."

Then the Omniscient One said, "My woman, now you'll send her to her in-laws' place, won't you?"

"No, Lord. She is an unfortunate woman. Her parents-in-law don't like her. Her husband doesn't like her. Her brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law don't like her. No one at all loves her. They sent her away. Now they won't take her back."

The Omniscient One said, "Go. Now they will love her. They will accept her. They will come up to her saying, 'My eldest daughter-in-law has come.' They will sweep the house and spread cow-dung wash. They will put up banners (*gudhiya*). They'll set out a wooden seat for her. They will put *kumkum* on both of your foreheads. They're waiting for her now."

She went back to her lodgings. Then Maibaisem said to Ekaisem, "Ei, will you go to take Jasumae back to her in-laws?"

Ekaisem said, "What's this? If you like being in the presence of the Gosavi, why shouldn't I like it? I can't go," she said.

Early next morning Maibaisem came for *darslan*. She said, "Lord, Lord, I said to Ei, 'Will you go to take Jasmae back to her in-laws?' She said, I can't go."

The Omniscient One said, "My woman, you go and take her."

"No, Lord, I will not leave Gosavi's presence."

The Omniscient One said to Ekaisem, "My woman, you go. You will get the same thing there as she will get here."<sup>2</sup>

Then Ekaisem and Jasamaisem set off. They went to Paithan. [Ekaisem] asked for company for the journey.

Sarangpandit gave her a sari and a blouse, an anklet, a horse, and a servant to accompany them. Then, when they reached the village Jasmaisem's in-laws were waiting for them. They went up to greet them, saying, "Our eldest daughter-in-law has come". They were delighted. They took them in. They treated them with respect. They did everything the Gosavi had said they would. They made gold jewelry for Jasamaisem. She settled down to live there.

Then Ekaisem said, "Now I'm going to go home" They replied, "How will you go? After we have our planting festival meal, we will give you clothes, and we will accompany you home."

1. Krishna, who is both the principal god worshipped at Dvarka and like Chakradhar, one of the divine incarnations recognized by the Mahanubhavs.
2. Kolte's edition inserts Drstanta 85 at this point.

Then one day Maibaisem received a trance state (stiti) from the Gosavi in Elapur. On that same day the same thing happened to Ekaisem where she was. Ekaisem was sitting at the household shrine. And she went into trance there. And she set out immediately. They began to say, "This one's madness went away. Now the other one's got it."

Then Ekaisem said, "Take me home."

They said, "It's the season for working in the fields. We have to plant the wheat. We don't have any time. Stay. Then we'll give you a silk sari, and then we'll take you home."

She would not stay. She set out.

The Gosavi said to Shantibaisem, "My woman, your Ei is coming."

"What is this, Lord? My children don't break the rules I've made'. So how would Ei come?"

At that the Gosavi was silent. [Ekaisem] got as far as Paithan. The Omniscient One said, "My woman, your Ei has [almost] arrived."

"No, Lord. I said, 'Ei, I will come, or I will send a message. Otherwise don't come'."

Then on the day she was going to arrive, the Omniscient One said again, "My woman, your Ei is about to arrive." The Gosavi said this three times.

"What is this, Lord? How can Ei be coming? Whether the Gosavi said so then, or said so now, my Ei would not cross the line I've drawn."<sup>2</sup>

At that, Ekaisem reached Elapur. She came to the door. The Omniscient One said, "Isn't this your Ei who has come?" With that, Ekaisem entered. She stood in the courtyard. [Her mother] came outside and saw Ekaisem. "What is this, Ei? How have you come alone? I've been disagreeing with the Gosavi for a good while now, Ei. I would say to the Gosavi. . ."

She told her everything that had happened. When she told her that she had gone into trance, [Ekaisem] said, "Yes! That same day I went into trance. Mother, I was sitting at the household shrine. I went into a trance. And I came [here] without asking anyone's permission. They were saying, "This one got cured of madness, and now that one's got it.' And they started laughing. [at me]."

From *Lilacharitra*, 13th century

Tr. by Anne Feldhaus

1. Literally, 'they don't cross a line I've drawn'.

2. Kolte's edition adds *Drshtanta* 8.5 at this point.

## 6

## Political Upheaval in Devagiri

The Gosavi went to Savita, a village near Paithan, and sat in the temple square of Nagnath. Baise sent Indrabhat to the market to get cooking oil. When he returned with the oil, the Gosavi was sitting on the northern parapet. (As he saw Indrabhat coming), he asked him, "Indreya, what is the news from the town?" "Oh nothing, Lord", Indrabhat replied, "How could it be that there is no news?" the Gosavi asked. "Transfer of royalty has taken place. King Ramdev has occupied the throne. Amandev is dethroned. There is upheaval in Devagiri. Don't you see people running about? Don't you see the wounded being transported? Go and get the news."

Then Indrabhat went to the town, made inquiries and reported back to the Gosavi. "What you say is true, Lord", he said "People are watching the scene from the house top." Then the Gosavi stayed there for the night and left for Jogeshwari the next morning.

From *Lilacharitra*, 13th century

Tr. by S. G. Tulpule

## 7

## Making Fun of Sadhe's Laddus

One day Indrabhat said to Sadhe, "Eho, would you prepare laddus for me? I will offer them to the Gosavi." She said, "Yes, why not?" Then he brought her everything—jaggery, wheat, pepper corn and cooking oil. She ground the wheat into fine flour and put the syrup pot on the fire. By then it was time for her to go round for alms. She thought to herself, "By the time the syrup is ready, I will finish collection of alms from four houses. But she returned late and found the syrup too thick. She then prepared *laddus*. Indrabhat put them in a basket and brought them to the Gosavi and offered them to him. When Baisa, who was the house-keeper of the monastery, started breaking the *laddus* for the Gosavi's meal, she found them too hard. The next day, when Sadhe came for the morning worship, the Sarvajna said to her, "I have seen excellent house-keeping women, but none of them could prepare *laddus* which require pounding with pestles to break them." Then Sadhe said, "No, it happened like this. I put the syrup pot on the fire and it was already time for my round of begging. So I went to four houses. Then I returned late. By that time the syrup had thickened. That is why the *laddus* are hard." The Sarvajna said, "I have seen many excellent house-keeping women; but none of them kept the syrup pot on the fire and left

for her round of alms." Then he laughed. The next day Indrabhat got food cooked and offered it to the Gosavi.

From *Lilacharitra*, 13th century

Tr. by S. G. Tulpule

## 8

### He Meets Padmanabhi on the Road, He Tells about Dhandal's Liberation

Along the road he met Padmadev<sup>1</sup>. The Omniscient One said, "Are your mother and father and Jognayak all right?"

"Yes, Lord."

"Then how did you come?"

"Lord, Lord, they did not permit me to leave. They put a guard at the door. They did not even let me go outside. Then, Lord, my sister-in-law hung a rope from the parapet. I climbed the fortification wall by standing on my sister-in-law's shoulders. Then I climbed down the rope."

As they were travelling along, Padmanabhi made a wish:

"If everyone in my family belonged to the Gosavi, I would get to be with the Gosavi.<sup>2</sup> Then he began to say to himself, "These sinners don't let me get close to the Gosavi. I will serve him and at the same time I will do that<sup>3</sup> too."

The Omniscient One said, "Batika, do you want something?"

"Yes, Lord."

Baisem said, "Batika, you have just arrived. What can you wish for now?"

The Omniscient One said, "My woman, the child wants to get Dhandal's liberation."<sup>4</sup>

"What is that like, Baba?"

The Omniscient One said, "My woman, Dhandal was a Kunbi.<sup>5</sup> He was poor. Indra's elephant used to come from heaven to graze in his field. It would come and eat his *tur*. One day during the daytime, he went to look at his *tur*, and saw that it had all been eaten. So he stayed to keep watch. He saw the elephant coming. He took a stick in his hand and began to run after it. He held its tail with one hand, and struck it once. With that, the elephant sprang up. It took him to heaven.

"Indra's court was assembled, with Indra at the head. [Dhandal said], 'Let a thief take your lousy buffalo!<sup>6</sup> It has eaten my whole crop.'

1. Padmanabhi

2. This sentence translates a variant reading in Kolte's edition.

3. Live the house holder's life with my family.

4. Variant placed earlier in Kolte's edition has Chakradhar comment, i.e. "My woman, the child is trying to go to liberation along with his family the way Dhandal died"

5. Farmer

6. *Mhalsarini*. A derogatory term for the elephant.

"They said, 'How much did it eat? We'll give it back to you. Don't shout. Spread out your shawl.'

"He spread out his shawl. They put gold into it. He tied it into a bundle, and then he said, 'Now how can I go?'

"They said, 'How did you get here?'

'By holding on to the lousy buffalo's tail.'

"Then they said, 'Put your bundle onto the buffalo's back and hold onto his tail and go. But let our buffalo graze in your field'

"All right.' He brought back the money. Then his family became wealthy, so that they began to eat rice and ghee and they began to chew pan.

"The neighbour women began to say, 'Dhandal Dado looks different these days.' Some of the old ladies asked, 'Dhandal Dado, you have an awful lot to eat and drink these days. You don't go to your field. What's going on? How have you come to be so wealthy?'

"He replied, 'What can I tell you?' Then he told them the whole story.

"And they said, 'Is that so? Then will you take us there?'

'All right. Come with me to the field in the evening. Then I'll take you.'

"So they went to the field. The elephant came, and he held its tail, and they held onto his waist. They formed a chain, each holding on to the other. Then he hit the elephant on the back with a stick, and it sprang up. They went along through the sky.

"As they were going along through the sky, one of the old ladies asked, 'Dhandal Dado, how much cotton do you get there for one gold?'

This much, he said, and spread his arms. He let go of the elephant's tail, and everyone fell down."

The Omniscient One said, "He hadn't seen any cotton in heaven, had he? But for the sake of a lie, they all fell down. He brought about his own death. Therefore you should not tell lies. In the same way, my woman, this child is trying to get Dhandal's liberation<sup>1</sup>.

From *Lilacharitra*, 13th century

Tr. by Anne Feldhaus

## 9

### Chakradhar to Parthabaise on the Nature of God

One day the Sarvajna said to Bhatoba, "Eh, Vanareya, here is a job for you.

1. Kolte's edition adds *Drashtanta* 35 here.

You have to worship me and offer me food." "Yes, Sir", said Bhatoba. He had only six *dams* (coins) on him. So he bought rice and wheat flour worth three dams and gave the ghee pot to Baise. Then he left for Nevase to bring material for the worship. The Gosavi was sitting on a raised seat when Parthbaise came for his *darshan* and sat next to him. Suddenly, he felt like giving discourse. Then he said to Parthbaise, "O woman, do you know the nature of God?" "No, Sir, I don't", she replied. The Sarvajna explained, "Why is Vanareya late?" He climbed atop the temple and stood there facing east. He waited for a while for Bhatoba and went inside the temple. Then Parthbaise pleaded to the Gosavi, "Kindly explain the nature of God." The Sarvajna said, "My woman, how can God be explained?" Again he said, "But why is Vanareya so late?" Again he climbed to the top of the temple and waited there for him for a while. Again he (came down), entered the temple and again Parthbaise prayed to him. "Baba, kindly explain the nature of God". The Sarvajna said, "My woman, how can God be described?" "No, you have to tell me", she said, Then the Sarvajna discoursed: "God is not made of stone, God is not made of wood, or of clay, or of cloth or metal. God made of stone may shatter, wooden god may break, a clay god or painted god may be wiped out, a cloth god may be torn and a metal god may be drenched. But God is unbreakable, invincible, unimaginable, unpaintable.

As the Gosavi was discoursing thus, Baise was inside the temple busy doing some work. She came there and prostrated herself at his feet and said, "Baba, neither I nor Nagdev (Bhatoba) is here. Who is being addressed?" The Sarvajna said, I have an urge to do so, I will make one of the pillars a listener and give my discourse." So saying, he thumped the pillar and said, "But why is Vanareya so late?" When he was about to look for him, Bhatoba arrived. The Sarvajna asked him, "Why this delay?" "Yes, Sir, only a bit late." Then he handed over to Baise the leaf vegetable he had brought with him and said to the Gosavi, "In fact, I am not late. But the Gosavi says I am late. Why?" The Gosavi said, "I had an urge to give a discourse and was waiting for you." Then the Gosavi gave to Bhatoba the same discourse he had given to Parthbaise.

From *Lilacharitra*, 13th century

Tr. by S.G. Tulpule

## 10

### He Touches Umai with His Toe when She Bows to Him.

One day after the Gosavi's morning worship was over, the Gosavi was going out for a walk. Umaisem was sitting near the southern doorway, on the western side. Umaisem was menstruating, so she bowed to the Gosavi's holy feet without touching them. The Gosavi placed the big toe of his holy foot on her forehead. And she was embarrassed.

Then the Omniscient One said, "What is this, woman? Did you pollute my big toe?"

"No, Lord. I didn't do it. The Gosavi held his holy foot above me."

Then the Omniscient One said, "Vanara!"<sup>1</sup>

"Yes, Lord."

"My big toe has become polluted. Now we'll have to take it to Lonar. We'll have to take it to Kedar. We'll have to take it to Malinath."

The Omniscient One said, "My woman, [the body has] nine channels and seventy-two stores. This is one of the nine channels, my woman. One channel is dark; another channel is white. Why should the dark one cause pollution? Why should the white one not cause pollution? There's nothing in it. At one moment the channel of one of the senses exudes a fluid. One goes down; another goes up."

Umaisem said, "Lord, Lord, What is menstrual fluid?"

The Omniscient One said, "My woman, there are these nine openings. Just as the nose runs, the eye sooze, the ears collect wax, the mouth excretes spittle, and faeces come from the private parts, in the same way this is a substance that flows and then stops flowing. You should not hold a bad view of it. If you do, you'll suffer torments after death."<sup>2</sup>

"No, Lord. From today onwards I won't, Lord."

From *Lberlacharitra*, 13th century.

Tr. by Anne Feldhaus

9

### Shudra's Concept of Happiness

The Sarvajna said, "There was a Shudra. He would go to the river, wash his hands and feet, have a look at the Shiva-linga and go home. Then he would sit on a wooden seat near the cot. By that time, his wife would bring him a plate of hot stuff which she had just prepared and pour *vethagi* and *dal* over it. He would mix it extremely thin and eat it with relish. He would then drink a potful of butter-milk, rinse his mouth, unroll a two-fold sleeping cloth two arms long and lie down on it. He would then chew a pan made of four quality pieces of betel nut and dried-up betel leaves. His two nose-running daughters would roll over his belly. And he would say to himself, "Oh, I am supremely happy."

1. "Monkey", Chakradhar's name for Nagdev or Bhatoba, the appointed leader of his disciples.
2. Literally, you'll get a *pratadeha*, or *pretadeha*, a body in which to suffer torments after death.



The Sarvajna observed, "The Shudra could not conceive that any other kind of happiness is possible."

From *Lilacharitra*, 13th century

Tr. by S. G. Tulpule

## 12

### He Says that He Attracts Men and Women

The Gosavi went to Brahmacharidev's cell. Brahmacharidev's woman<sup>1</sup> was spreading cowdung in the courtyard. She saw the Gosavi, and she gave the Gosavi a hug. His whole upper garment became smeared with cowdung.

Some Brahmans who were in the *linga* temple said, "Shri Changdev Raul Gosavi is extremely attractive to women."

The woman released her embrace, and Brahmacharidev saw the Gosavi. He ran out from his cell. He hit his eyebrow on the doorframe. He cut his eyebrow, but he kept on coming.

He reached the Gosavi and embraced him. [The Gosavi's] whole upper garment became smeared with blood.

Then the Gosavi looked at [the Brahmans] and said, "Men and women are equally attracted to me."

Then Brahmacharidev prepared a seat for the Gosavi on the verandah. The Gosavi sat on the seat. The Gosavi tied the *pan* from his mouth to [Brahmacharidev's] eyebrow.

[Brahmacharidev] washed the Gosavi's feet. He offered him *pan*. Then the Gosavi left.

He tells Mahadaisem that eyes are lamps.

Mahadaisem asked the Gosavi, "Lord, Lord, does everyone in Gujarat have beautiful eyes like the Gosavi's?" The Omniscient One said, "My woman, Gujaratis' eyes are lamps!"

From *Lilacharitra*, 13th century

Tr. by Anne Feldhaus

## 13

### He Tells about the Village Leader's Pride

One day the Omniscient One said, "A certain village leader was sitting on a platform under a tree. His daughter-in-law gave birth to a child. Someone came to tell him: 'Your daughter-in-law has given birth. She's had a boy.'"

1. A variant in Kolte's edition has "female disciple."

"He said, 'When my daughters-in-law give birth, they always have boys. That's how things are in my house.' He twisted his moustache." With his holy hand, [the Gosavi] imitated the twisting.

"When my maidservants give birth, they always have girls.<sup>1</sup> That's how things are in my house. When my mares give birth, they always have colts. That's how things are in my house. When my cows give birth, their calves are always bulls. That's how things are in my house. When my water buffaloes give birth, their calves are always female. That's how things are in my house." Each time, [the Gosavi] made the gesture with his holy hand.

The Omniscient One said, "But what he did not see was that Time<sup>2</sup> is waiting for his gulp. Half is gone. We do not know when he will swallow the other half."

From *Lilacharitra*, 13th century

Tr. by Anne Feldhaus

## 2

### The Deeds of the Lord in Riddhipur

*Govindaprabhu Charitra* (13th century) is a religious biography, written by Mhaimbhat. Its subject is Govindaprabhu, also called Gundam Raul, and it has the form of memoir-writing. Gundam Raul, though God incarnate according to the Mahanubhavas, seems to be a crazy and even funny person as presented in the present biography.

## i

### His Light is Seen

One day the Gosavi had fallen asleep among the students. Light was streaming from his holy body. The students saw it, and they were afraid. They came to the teacher and told him, "Teacher, light is coming from Gundo's head. He is talking to himself. He is saying, 'Why have you come? Why have you gone?'"

The teacher said, "No one knows who this Gundo is. He is an incarnation of Ishvara"

## ii

### He Covers a Child with a Double Water Bag

A certain housewife set off to get water. There was no one (else), old or

<sup>1</sup>"Girls" translates a variant reading in Kolte's edition.  
Or Death.

young, in her house. Just then, the Gosavi came along. She said, "Raul, take my child for a moment while I get a load of water."

So the Gosavi took him and played with him for a while. Then he got a double water bag down from its peg. He laid him down to sleep on one of its halves, and he covered him with the other half. And the Gosavi left.

The woman returned. She set down her water pot. She entered the house, looked in the cradle, and saw no sign (of her child). She looked on the bed, but he wasn't there either. Then she asked her women-friends in the neighbourhood, "Did the Raul leave my child with you?"

"No, he didn't give him to us," (they all said). Then her neighbour friends added, "How could you put your child into the hands of the Raul? The Raul is mad. The Raul is possessed. What will you do when he throws him into a small well, or when he throws him into a big well?"

At that, she went running into the house. Just then the (top) half of the double water bag stirred. She looked, and she saw her child. He was motionless.

And immediately she cried out, "O mother, what will I do? O mother, what will I do?" and she lifted the child and looked at him.

He was sleeping happily.

### *iii*

#### He Brings a Dead Child to Life

The Gosavi used to play with someone's child. It died. It was taken and buried in a pathway, at the northeast corner of the Vajeshvara temple.

The Gosavi arrived then at its house. (Its mother) saw the Gosavi and began to cry. Then she said, "Raul, the child you used to play with died today," and everyone began to cry. And the Raul felt compassion.

Then the Gosavi said, "Oh, drop dead! Bring it here! Bring it here, I tell you."

"What can I bring now, Raul," she said.

"Oh, drop dead!" (he replied). "It should be brought, I say... It should not be brought, I say. . . Yes, It must be brought, I tell you!" and he went trotting off.

He went to the place, cleared away the stones, and dug. Then he pulled out (the baby), brushed it, wiped it, and began looking at it blissfully. Then he put it on his hip and brought it back.

(Its mother) saw them, and shut the door. "Take it away! Take it away, Raul! Take the corpse back!" (she said).

Next door to them lived an old woman. He took (the child) and put it into her arms. "Raul," she said, "what am I to do? I am a hundred years old."

So the Gosavi put her nipple into its mouth. Milk rushed into her breast. It began to suck noisily.

At this point, (the mother) opened her door. She looked, and saw what was happening.

The Gosavi left.

She began to ask for (her child). The old woman said, "Why wouldn't you take him when he was offered to you? And why should I give him to you now?"

With that, (the mother) set off to make a complaint to the village headman. The headmen said, "The Raul gave him to her; the child is hers. You may love the child. but you may not have him. Now you must live near him."

So she began to live near him, and she gave him a bed and a mattress. She gave him a cow.

Eventually he lived to be a hundred years old. He became a skilled cowherd. His name was Damodhar. For the rest of his life, he had no fevers. He used to tell the devotees about the divine deed which he had experienced.

#### *iv*

### He Drinks Water at the Mangs' Water-stand

The Gosavi went to the Mangs' water-stand. A child was seated there. The Gosavi took in his holy hand one of the two animal horns that had been placed there, and he ran after the child. (The child) ran away.

(The Gosavi) took the drinking pitcher in his holy hand, and he drank. He emptied all the water of the water jar. The Gosavi washed his holy hands and holy face in the water left in the bottom of the jar. He washed his holy feet right in the water jar. Then the Gosavi left.

#### *v*

### He Uproots and Replants a Grapevine

The Gosavi went to Alajpur. At a certain Brahman's house, there was a grapevine. The Gosavi uprooted it. The (Brahman) said, "Hey, Raul! Why did you pull up a fruit-bearing, blooming plant?"

On the third day, the Gosavi brought it back. Then he dug in the ground with a stick. He planted the roots. He poured on three handfuls of water from the water jar.

The (Brahman) said, "Raul, it's dry and withered. How will it take root now?"

Then the Gosavi went off. Three days later it sprouted bunches of fruits and flowers. And the (Brahman) was amazed. He said, "The Raul is our Mother. The Raul is our Father. The Raul is Ishvara. There is nothing the Raul cannot do." He began to praise him this way.

Then the Gosavi left.

### *vi*

#### He Serves Milk to Daughters-in-Law

Vithalu Joisi had two daughters-in-law. He had cows which were giving milk; they gave a great deal of milk. His house was right next door to Emaism's. The mother-in-law's name was Elhaisem. She used to have milk with her meal and serve buttermilk to her daughters-in-law. And they would be wishing (for milk).

At that point, the Gosavi would come along. The women would be eating their evening meal. They would be cooling milk in a shallow pan. He would serve the daughters-in-law the milk with a small clay pot. Bending over their plates, they would protest, "Raul! Raul! That's supposed to be made into butter-milk in the morning." But they would be protesting falsely. Inside themselves they would be happy.

The Gosavi would say, "Drop dead! Don't shout!" and act angry. And they would drink it in silence. He would serve buttermilk to their mother-in-law, and he would leave.

In the morning when they churned (the milk), it would turn to buttermilk, and they would get exactly the usual amount of butter.

### *vii*

#### He Bursts a Prostitute's Cyst

A prostitute from Ajlapur was going on pilgrimage to Ramtek. She stopped in Riddhipur, at the Nagareshvara temple. All her companions went into the marketplace. Left all alone, she fell asleep, lying on her stomach. She had a cyst on her back.

At that time, the Gosavi came there. He placed his holy foot on her back and, pounding, burst the cyst. The Gosavi squeezed out the bloody pus. He took away the pain that she had had.

Then she said, "The Raul is our Mother. The Raul is our Father. The Raul has taken away my pain."

Then the Gosavi left. Her companions returned. They asked her, "How did this happen?"

"The Raul came here," she said, "He burst my cyst. He took away the pain. The Raul is our Mother. The Raul is our Father. The Raul has taken care of me."

"You go on with the Ramtek pilgrimage," she added. "I'm not coming." And she returned to Alajpur.

### *viii*

#### How He Ate the Prostitute's Food

The same prostitute came to Riddhipur from Alajpur, bringing foods from the snack stall. Shripabhu Gosavi had just washed his dhoti at Ram well and Lakshman well. The Gosavi was going northwards, towards the foot of a pipal tree, when she arrived.

She met the Gosavi on the Indur road. She prostrated herself then she made her offering. The Gosavi accepted it. He ate right there. He rinsed his mouth and chewed *pan*.

Then he took a rounded stone in each of his holy hands and said, "Drop dead! Go away, I tell you!" He chased after her. She left from right there. He would not let her enter the village at all.

Then the Gosavi left.

### *ix*

#### He Answers the Mang's Plea

One day the Mangs pleaded, "Raul, we are dying for lack of water. What can we do, Lord?" The Raul felt compassion.

Then the Gosavi said, "Drop dead, I tell you!" and he went there. "You should dig here, I say. . . . You shouldn't dig, I say. . . . Yes, you must dig here, I tell you." And he pointed with his holy big toe.

They dug there, and they struck an unlimited supply of water. So they said, "The Raul is our Mother. The Raul is our Father. By the grace of the Raul we have water to drink."

## x

## He Punishes Sadhem

Abaisem had made Sadhem stand guard. When the Gosavi came, he used to break up the cooked food and ruin it. He would make *prasad* of it. That is why she had Sadhem stand guard.

The Gosavi came along. He began to make *prasad* (of the food). Sadhem shouted, "Abai! Run here! Run here! The Gosavi is making *prasad*."

The Gosavi said, "Oh, drop dead! Why are you shouting?" and he ran at her.

She started to run. She was so fat that she couldn't run away. She got caught in the barrier at the gate. She got caught in the bar across the small door to the west.

Her body was exposed. With his holy hands the Gosavi took hold of her breasts, and immediately he began to put on an act. "Oh, cut them on the slicing blade. I tell you! Fry them, I tell you. Make spice powder of them. Make a rice cake of them, I tell you. Make a salad of them. I tell you. Hang them up, I tell you."

Sadhem began to shout, "Abai! Run here! Run here!"

When Abaisem arrived, the Gosavi let (Sadhem) go.

Abaisem said, "Can there be anything wrong with Ishvara? Does he like this kind of thing?"

Then from that time on, Bhat sewed blouses for the women.

## xi

## His Grief-Stricken Daughter Comes

The Gosavi's daughter was in Savalapur. She heard in the house that the Gosavi had gone home. (According to some, she heard the news at the place where she had gone to get water, and she left her water pot there.)

She came to Riddhipur. Her eyes were blinded from her sorrow. She cried the whole way on account of her father; she was still crying when she arrived.

Meanwhile, his whole body had been anointed with sandalwood paste. Flowers were offered to him. *Pan* was crushed and put into his holy mouth. A new fine silk garment was draped over his holy body. Then he was laid on a bier, and Bhat, Mhaimbhat, Lakshmindrabhat, and it's not know who the fourth was, carried away the bier. They stopped at the foot of a tamarind tree, near its eastern branches.

The Gosavi's daughter arrived as they were digging the grave. She saw the bier and threw herself down with a loud thump. She fainted. Bhat and Mhaimbhat ran up to her and revived her. Then she began to sob and moan. She threw herself onto the holy body and began wailing, "My maternal home is gone."

Seeing her suffer this way, Bhat and Mhaimbhat were broken-hearted. The devotees were all very sad. Bhat and Mhaimbhat said, "She truly is the Gosavi's daughter." And Bhat said, "He fondled us and kept us happy. We know that he was Ishvara. (But) our grief is not as great as (hers)."

From *Govindaprabhucharitra*, 13th century

Tr. by Anne Feldhaus

## Selections

KESHOBAS

1

### Parables

The *Drishtantapatha* (Dṛṣṭantapāṭha), by KESHOBAS (Keshobās), also called Keshiraja, is a collection of 114 parables narrated by Chakradhar in order to illustrate his religious and ethical teachings. These were culled out from *Lilacharitra* and presented by Keshiraja in a systematic form. Each *drishtanta* contains three parts; 1. Sutra; 2. Drishtanta; and 3. Darshantika. Of these the first two are by Chakradhar and the last by Keshobas himself. The *Drishtantapatha* appeared a little later than *Lilacharitra*, i.e., in about 1290.

### The Parable of a Field Watchman

*Sutra or Dictum:* How would the bullock allow the ropes, that fasten its legs together, to be cut? I know the past deeds of the *jivas* and therefore do not take pity on them. If I draw out your faults, you will die of the pain of being pierced by knives.

*Drishtanta or Illustration:* A field watchman was standing on a raised structure. A robber lived in the ditch of his field. He used to waylay and kill newly married couples, Brahmins and ascetics. The fieldman saw all this, but kept quiet. One day the robber fell into the hands of the king who made him pull a water-wheel as a punishment for his crimes. All the villagers gathered to see him undergoing this punishment and said, "Oh, poor fellow! looks nice and handsome, smallish and delicate like the son of a queen. Why has the



king put him under the yoke? Why should he not try him?" When the field watchman came there with a veil over his head, he heard what the people were saying. Then he said to them, "I know the sins that he has committed. It would be therefore just to cut him into small pieces and offer them to the village." *Darshtantika* or *Inference*: Like that, God descends on the earth in the garb of a human being. He knows the past deeds of the *jivas* and therefore, does not take pity on them. But he does care for those who follow him.

### The Parable of an Elephant

*Dictum* : One speaks according to one's being. God, however, has infinite powers and He arranges things for all.

*Illustration* : Once an elephant came to town. Those who were born blind went to see the elephant. One of them touched its leg. One touched the trunk. One touched the ear. One touched the back. One touched the belly. One touched the tail. Then they began to discuss among themselves. (Said one to the other), "Eh, have you seen the elephant?" The one who had touched its leg said that the elephant was like a pillar. The one who had touched the trunk said that it was like a wooden pestle. The one who had touched the ear said that the elephant was like a winnowing fan. The one who had touched the back said that it was like a wall. The one who had touched the belly said that it was like a big sack. The one who had touched its tail said that the elephant was like a broom. In this way they were refuting each other's views. One of them was with sight. He said, "What you describe are the different parts of the elephant, and not the elephant itself. These parts go to make the elephant." *Inference*: Similarly, one experiencing a particular power of God calls that power God. The knower, however, says that these are the different powers or attributes of God, but not God himself. God is constituted of these powers or attributes.

### The Parable of a Touch-stone

*Dictum* : Whenever one is effective, one is ineffective; whenever one is ineffective, one is effective.

*Illustration* : A Mahatma had with him a touch-stone. Once he went to the house of a Brahmin for a night's stay. Outside it was drizzling and his clothes had become wet. So the Brahmin's wife offered him a seat in the verandah, washed his feet and gave him a potful of water for his evening ablutions. By that time the Brahmin returned home carrying a bundle of grass on his head. They were a poor couple. He had a cow. He milked it. He cooked a porridge of *rala* grains and served it to the Mahatma with warmed butter. A dish

was arranged for him and he ate with the two. A torn-up rag was spread over a cot for him to sleep on. Before that they massaged his feet and washed them. Pleased, he said to them, "Take out all the iron pieces you have, tie them together and put them under my bed. Accordingly, they collected all their agricultural implements like the plough, the axe, the sickle, etc. and placed them under his bed. The Mahatma got up early in the morning, took out his touch-stone, applied it to the iron pieces and left the place. The Brahmin got up at his usual time and went to the field with his implements. As he yoked the plough, its blade started bending. The *tuta*, the earth-breaker, could no more do its job. The sickle would not cut the grass. The axe could not cut the trees any more. It bent in the process. Feeling sad, he returned home with the implements. He threw them at the door and said to his wife, "Oh, you are a sinner. Whom have you entertained? The Mahatma has practised black magic on us. My golden day is lost." By the time she came out it was broad daylight. As she removed the mud gathered on the iron pieces, she could see gold shining underneath. Then she said to her husband, "Did the Mahatma practise black magic or cut at the very root of our poverty?" Saying so, she took all the pieces inside the house.

*Inference:* In a similar way, God knows what is good for you.

### The Parable of a Feudatory Prince

*Dictum:* A man attains renown just for doing his duty. Truth prevails.

*Illustration:* There lived a king. When he was dethroned, his servants left him and took up jobs elsewhere. The feudatory prince, Sinderane would not serve anyone except the throne, would not say "victory" to anyone else, would not accept anything from anyone, and would not ask anyone for anything. He would maintain his family by doing some kind of work. When the king came back to the throne, all his servants, returned to him. One day, as he was sitting in the court he looked around, and said, "Where is our Sinderane? He is not seen." Then they told him: "Sinderane would not serve anyone, not ask anyone for anything. He would do some odd job and maintain his family." On hearing this the king sent a palanquin to bring him. When he arrived, the king received him with state honours and brought him to the royal court in procession. He gave him half of his own kingdom and thus made him his equal.

*Inference:* In a similar way, the initiate does not serve any person other than his guru, does not praise anyone else. He somehow maintains his body and soul together. Then god gives him His presence and half of His own power. The devotee thus is equated with God.

## 2

## Aphorisms

The *Sutrapatha* (Sūtrapātha) is a collection of the aphorisms of Chakradhar culled out from *Lilacharitra*. This work was done by Keshobas, one of the learned followers, soon after his death. The *Sutrapatha* contains more than a thousand *Sutras* or aphorisms, and forms the central doctrinal thought of the MahanuBhava sect. The following *sutras* are from the chapters on Ethics: *Acham* and *Acharamalika*.

## Renunciation

Worthy of renunciation is your attachment to your own land; renounce your attachment to your own village; renounce especially your attachment to your relatives.

\*

To the extent a man enjoys pleasures of the sense, he becomes weak in *dharma*.

\*

Woman is the chief of intoxicating substances. Other substances intoxicate by being consumed; woman intoxicates just by being seen.

\*

Do not look at even the picture of a woman.

\*

A single limb of a woman's body causes one who sees it to throw himself onto the point of a sword. Later he sees her whole body on the funeral pyre, but he goes away, holding the end of his garment before his eyes. Why? What intoxicates him is not there.

\*

Break off an attachment through which passion arises.

\*

There are heroes who have conquered men, but there is no hero who has conquered sensuality.

\*

There are those in whom religion is destroyed, but none in whom sensuality is destroyed.

\*

He who shows off his asceticism is uneasiness itself.

\*

Independence is liberation; dependence is bondage.

\*

Some fall away while practising sensuality etc.; some fall away without practising it.

### Remembering God

Put a lock on both your lips.

\*

Recollect God's names. God identifies himself with his names.

\*

One who meditates on me is rare.

\*

Recollection, repeated recollection, and recollection once a day.

\*

Keep God in mind while you are lying down, sitting, and eating.

\*

Think of me (at least) once or twice; do not allow a day to go to waste.

### The Company of co-seekers

You meet in the course of wandering, or you meet by pre-arrangement.

\*

Those of you who have met one another have as good as met me.

\*

Ease (one another's) weariness.

\*

Eat and drink together.

\*

Exchange your ragged clothes.

\*

Talk about what I have said and done.

\*

Sleep is better than talking about irrelevant matters.

Sleep, rather, but do not talk about irrelevant matters.

\*

Conversation in which there is no happiness or benefit or love is nothing; it is shouting in the forest.

\*

The first and last moments of meeting are precious.

,

\*

Have discussions with one another. Then you will get new insights.

\*

Bulls in the same herd shed blood and fight; but they sit crowded side by side.

\*

Those who have the same God and the same *dharma* should have the highest love for one another.

### *Surrendering to God*

One should be dependent on God. Give your whole life to God.

\*

The living should take on the characteristics of the dead.

\*

One who has taken refuge in me does not die.

## Selections

### JNANESHWAR

The credit of establishing in the 13th century the Warkari or the Bhagwat sect—the most popular sect in Maharashtra—goes to SHRI JNANESHWAR (Jñāneswar, 13th century). The Warkari sect in Maharashtra is based on *advait bhakti* and the deity it worships is *Vitthal*, identified with Vishnu.

Jñaneshwar was born in Apegaon in Maharashtra in 1271. His father Vitthalpant was excommunicated by Brahmins because he had entered the *grihasthashrama* after taking *sanyasa*. For this reason, Jñaneshwar was denied the right to thread ceremony. In 1290 Jñaneshwar wrote *Bhavartha Dipika* or *Jñaneshwari*—a poetic commentary on the *Bhagvadgita*, running into eighteen thousand *ovees*. The work advocates the Warkari sect's doctrine of *advait bhakti*. Another great but independent work that he wrote is *Amritanubhav*. *Changdev Pasashti* is yet another work by Jñaneshwar which contains the quintessence of his philosophy.

Jñaneshwar's cultural achievement was that he advocated, in his works, that women and the lower castes had the right to *bhakti* and thereby attracted people from all castes to the Warkari sect. His independent achievement is seen in his formulation of his philosophy in the language of the masses—Marathi. Justice Ranade has rightly described this by saying that the Warkari sect established democracy in the spiritual field.

The XII Canto is a poetic commentary on the nature of the *Sthitaprajna* as described in the *Gita*, while Canto XIII is a poetic interpretation of the concept of non-violence, *ahimsa*. The concluding part of *Jñaneshwari*, known as the *Pasayachin*, is an invocation to God, praying for the welfare and spiritual upliftment of all beings. All these writings reveal Jñaneshwar's profound understanding of *advait* philosophy and the *bhakti* tradition he brought to bear upon it in an unprecedented way. One experiences here Jñaneshwar's sublime personality along with his extraordinary poetic sensitivity. *Jñaneshwari* has therefore the status of a classic in Marathi literature.

### 1

#### The Yoga of Devotion

I hail to you, O grace-bestowing power, who are pure, famous for  
your generosity, and always pouring out showers of joy! (1)

When a person is overcome by the grasp of the serpent of sense  
pleasures, its bite is made harmless by one glance of your grace. (2)

If you flow over us with the waves of your favour whom can<sup>\*</sup>  
the heat of passion burn or the fire of grief consume? (3)

O blessed grace, you reveal to your disciples the bliss of yoga,  
and you satisfy their yearning for self-realization. (4)

You rear them lovingly in the lap of the power seated in  
the *muladhara chakra* and rock them to sleep in the cradle  
of the heart. (5)

You encircle them with the light of discrimination, you give  
them mind control and the vital force as toys for their play,  
and you wrap them in the clothing of the bliss of the Self. (6)

You nurse them with the supreme Self, sing them songs of the  
mystic unstruck sound as lullabies, and lull them to sleep by  
telling them of the final absorption in the Self. (7)

Thus you are the mother of spiritual seekers, and all knowledge  
matures at your feet. Therefore, I will not leave the shadow of  
your protection. (8)

O grace of the Guru, one who is supported by your favour  
becomes like the creator of the whole world of knowledge. (9)

Therefore, O wealthiest of mothers and wishfulfilling tree for  
your devotees, command me to expound this work. (10)

O mother, let the ocean of the nine feelings fill my speech,  
create mines of the finest figures of speech, and raise  
mountains of the interpretation of the meaning. (11)

I beg of you, open up in the soil of the Marathi language a gold  
mine of literary composition, and cultivate it in vines of discernment. (12)

Jnaneshwar says, Plant in it dense gardens ever full of the  
abundant fruit of the discussion of philosophical problems. (13)

Break up the ravines of heresy, destroy the bypaths of  
controversy, and slay the evil beasts of false reasoning. (14)

Make me always remain seated at the feet  
of Lord Krishna, and set the listeners  
on the throne of hearing. (15)



Let the blessed day of the knowledge of the Absolute come  
to the city of the Marathi language, and let the world trade only  
in the bliss of union. (16)

Clothe me in your blessed favour, and I will soon  
accomplish all of this. (17)

Hearing the prayer of his disciple, the gracious Guru looked at  
him and told him to say no more but to begin at once the  
exposition of the *Gita*. (18)

Jnaneshwar, filled with joy, exclaimed, Lord, Lord, I will  
do this! Then he said to his listeners, I will now begin to exploit the  
work. Listen ! (19)

*Arjuna Spoke :*

The constantly steadfast devotees who  
worship you with devotion, and those who worship the  
eternal unmanifest;  
which of these has the better knowledge of yoga?

Then Arjuna, the greatest of all warriors and the victorious  
leader of the Lunar race, began to speak. (20)

He said to Krishna, have You heard? You showed me Your  
cosmic form, and I was terrified by that marvelous vision. (21)

Being familiar with Your human form as Krishna, my desire at  
once turned to that but You forbade me to have such a wish. (22)

O Lord, You are indeed both the manifest and the unmanifest.  
The manifest is reached through devotion, and the unmanifest  
is attained by yoga. (23)

These are the two paths which lead to You, O Krishna, and the  
manifest and the unmanifest are the two thresholds which open  
onto them. (24)

Look, when a bar of gold of a hundred grains is tested with  
a touchstone, the effect is the same as it would be with a piece  
of one grain. In the same way, both the limited and the  
limitless have the same value. (25)

The power that lies in an ocean of nectar is found equally in a  
handful taken from one of its waves. (26)

I truly believe this from my experiences, but there is one question which I wish to ask you, O Krishna. (27)

Will You tell me, O Lord, whether that cosmic form which You assumed for a time is real, or merely a display of Your power? (28)

Those devotees whose actions are dedicated to You, for whom You are the highest goal, whose hearts are wholly given to devotion. (29)

And who in many other ways worship You, O Krishna, with all their heart and soul; (30)

And on the other hand those wise ones who worship You, the unmanifest, who are beyond even the sacred syllable and inexpressible in speech, untouched by any bondage, (31)

The imperishable one, unmanifest, beyond space or definition; (32)

Of these two, the devotees and the wise – who, O Eternal One, are more truly the knowers of yoga? (33)

Krishna was pleased with these words of Arjuna and said, Your question is a good one. (34)

*The Blessed Lord spoke :*

Those who are eternally steadfast, who worship Me, fixing their minds on Me, endowed with supreme faith: I consider them to be the most devoted to Me.

Just as the sun's rays follow it as it reaches the border of the western mountain. (35)

So is the devotion of those who, with their senses merged in Me, serve Me without awareness of day or night. (36)

Similarly, their love abounds just as the waters of the Ganges seem to increase even after they have poured into the ocean. (37)

Just as the waters of a river rise in the rainy season, O Arjuna, their devotion seems to increase more and more. (38)

Such devotees, who devote themselves entirely to Me, I  
consider to be the ones who are the most perfected in yoga. (39)

But those who honour the imperishable, the indefinable,  
the unmanifest, all-pervading and unthinkable,  
the unchanging, the immovable, the eternal.

O Arjuna, there are also those whose minds, filled with the thought  
of oneness with the Absolute, reach but for that which is formless,  
imperishable, and indivisible; (40)

That One whom the mind is unable to grasp, who cannot be  
perceived by the intellect nor apprehended by the senses; (41)

Who being neither confined by space nor limited by form,  
is even beyond the reach of meditation; (42)

Who exists in every place, in every form and at all times;  
in contemplating whom the mind is utterly confused; (43)

Who comes into being and yet does not become, who  
exists yet is non-existent, and to reach whom all means are useless; (44)

Who neither moves nor sways, who is neither diminished  
nor sullied, and whom these devotees, by their spiritual  
power, have made their own. (45)

Controlling all the senses, even-minded on all sides,  
rejoicing in the welfare of all creatures, they also attain Me.

Burning up the whole army of sense pleasures in the great fire  
of dispassion, they have brought their scorched passions  
under control. (46)

Driving them back with the noose of self-restraint, they  
confine them within the inner depths of the heart. (47)

Constraining the downward-moving breath with the help of the  
proper yogic posture, they build up the fortress of *mulabandha*. (48)

They break the bonds of desire, remove the rocks of timidity,  
and dispel the darkness of sleep. (49)

They burn the fluids of the body in the flames of the thunderbolt, making an offering of all diseases at the altar of the six chakras of the body. (50)

They set the torch of Kundalini at the *muladhara chakra*, and with this light they find the way to the *sahasrara* at the crown of the head. (51)

Closing fast the nine doors of the body with the strong bar of self-control, they open the window of the *sushumna nadi*. (52)

With the help of the goddess of the vital force, they kill the sheep of ideas and sacrifice it along with the buffalo of the mind (53)

Bringing together the *ida* and *pingala* nadis and thus calling forth the unstruck sound, they rise swiftly to the source of the vital principle. (54)

Through the central channel of the *sushumna*, they climb the stairway and reach the peak of the brahmarandhra. (55)

Again, ascending the steps of *makara* and passing beyond the abyss, they support themselves by the heavens and become absorbed in the Absolute. (56)

In this way, those who have an evenly balanced mind capture the boundless fortresses of yoga in order to attain union with the Absolute. (57)

Thus, O Arjuna, in exchange for their self-renunciation, they attain the unmanifest and are united with Me. (58)

It is not that they obtain anything more by these practices of yoga; rather, for them much more effort is required. (59)

The trouble of those whose minds are fixed on the unmanifest is greater, for the goal of the unmanifest is attained with difficulty by embodied beings.

For those who have abandoned the path of devotion and have set their minds on the unmanifest, the self-existent One, the source of the welfare of all beings. (60)

Aspirations to the highest heavenly rank are like highway robbers. They are laid low by the combined assault of prosperity and psychic powers. (61)

Many disturbances arise from desire and anger, and the body has to wrestle with the Spirit. (62)

Their thirst they must quench with thirst, and when hungry they must feed on hunger. Day and night they strive to measure the wind with the span of their arms. (63)

Wakefulness is their rest, for pleasure they have only restraint, and their only fellowship is with trees. (64)

They wear cold as a garment, clothe themselves with heat, and dwell in the rain as in a house. (65)

In short, O Arjuna, such practices are like the constant self-immolation of a widow. (66)

In this, the purpose of the husband is not served, nor is there fulfilment of family duty. It is merely an ever-recurring struggle with death. (67)

Is it possible to drink boiling poison more searing than death itself? Wouldn't the mouth that swallowed a mountain be torn to pieces? (68)

Therefore, O Arjuna, there will be many difficulties in the path of those who set out on the way of yoga. (69)

If a toothless man were to chew pieces of iron, would they satisfy his hunger, or wouldn't it mean certain death? (70)

Can a man swim across the ocean by the strength of his arms? Can he walk on air? (71)

Can a man going into battle expect to reach heaven without a single wound? (72)

O Arjuna, it is as difficult for an embodied man to reach the unmanifest as it would be for a lame man to compete with the wind. (73)

Even if they summon all their courage and ardently seek the  
unmanifest, only distress will befall them. (74)

O Arjuna, this is the lot of those who resort to the path of yoga. (75)

But those who, renouncing all action in Me, and regarding Me as  
the Supreme, worship Me, meditating on Me with undistracted yoga.

Those who, according to their caste, fulfill peacefully their duties  
through the organs of action, (76)

Who carry out prescribed actions and offer them to Me, omitting  
those that are forbidden, and burning up the fruits of their actions, (77)

O Arjuna, when they surrender them all to Me, they annul the  
fruits of those actions. (78)

Furthermore, all actions performed by the body or the mind  
have no other goal but Me. (79)

Those who serve only Me, who by always worshipping  
and contemplating Me have become My abode, (80)

Who consider all pleasure and enjoyment as well as the hope of  
liberation to be worthless, these devotees ever commune  
with Me in love. (81)

How I can tell what I do for those who have sold  
wholly to Me their bodies and souls? (82)

Of those whose thoughts have entered into Me,  
I am soon the deliverer from the ocean of death  
and transmigration, Arjuna.

To be brief, O Arjuna, you know how close a relationship there  
is between a mother and the child born from her womb. (83)

So it is with My devotees and Me, O Arjuna. In whatever state  
they may be, I have promised to overcome death for them. (84)

Besides this, my devotees have no need to be anxious on  
account of their worldly affairs. Does the wife of a rich man  
have to beg for food? (85)

Know that they are like members of My own family, I do not  
feel ashamed of anything that I do for them. (86)

Seeing this world of nature struggling in the surging  
waves of life and death, I felt thus in My heart: (87)

What man would not feel afraid in an ocean? It is no wonder  
then that My devotees should feel overcome with fear. (88)

O Arjuna, this is why I have become incarnate and come  
quickly to them. (89)

Those who were unattached I told to meditate on Me. To  
those with families, I recommended the repetition of My names. (90)

With My many names as boats in the ocean of worldly life,  
I have become the ferryman. (91)

With My love bound to them like a safety raft, I have led  
them to the other shore of liberation. (92)

In this way, I have made all My devotees, from animals  
to mankind, worthy of the throne of My heaven. (93)

Thus My devotees suffer no anxiety, for I always uplift them. (94)

When they devote their hearts to Me, they bind me to themselves. (95)

Therefore, O Arjuna, If you are determined to follow this path, (96)

Keep your mind on Me alone, your intellect on Me.  
Thus you shall dwell in Me hereafter. There is no doubt of this.  
Concentrate your mind and will earnestly on My nature. (97)

And when your mind and will have entered into Me through  
your loving devotion, you will attain union with Me. (98)

When the mind and the will have both merged in Me how  
can there remain any distinction of "I" and "You"? (99)

When a lamp is extinguished, its light fades away.  
When the sun sets, daylight vanishes. (100)

When the vital force leaves the body, the senses also depart with  
it. In the same way, awareness of oneself follows wherever the  
mind and will go. (101)

So fix your mind and will firmly on Me, and your will  
certainly be one with Me, the all-pervading One. (102)

I solemnly promise you that there is no other teaching than this. (103)

Or if you are not able to keep your mind steadily on Me,  
then seek to attain Me by the constant practice of yoga, Arjuna.

But if with your whole will and mind you are unable to fix  
your attention entirely on Me. (104)

Devote to this concentration at least a brief period during the  
twenty-four hours of the day. (105)

Then as long as the mind contemplates My joy, sense pleasures  
will not appeal to it. (106)

Just as at the end of the rainy season the rivers begin to subside,  
your mind will withdraw itself from worldly activities. (107)

Just as the moon begins to wane from the day of the full moon  
and is no longer visible by the day of the new moon, (108)

In the same way, withdrawing itself from sense pleasures  
and entering into Me, your mind will gradually be united  
with Me, O Arjuna. (109)

O Beloved, this is known as the yoga of constant practice.  
There is nothing that cannot be obtained by this method. (110)

Some are able to pass through the air through the power of this  
yoga; others have been able to tame tigers and serpents. (111)

Some can consume poison without harm; others may walk on  
water. Still others, through this yoga, have found it a simple  
matter to study even the Vedas. (112)

In fact, there is nothing which is too difficult to achieve by  
means of this practice, so strive to reach Me by this path. (113)

If you are incapable even of practice, be intent  
on My work; even performing actions for My sake,  
you shall attain perfection.



If you are unable to follow this path of practice,  
then continue in your present way of life. (114)

Do not restrain your senses, do not give up the enjoyment  
of pleasure, nor relinquish your pride of caste. (115)

Carry out your family duties, perform prescribed  
actions, and avoid those that are prohibited.

In this way you will be free to act as you wish. (116)

But do not say that you yourself are the doer of your thoughts,  
words, and actions. (117)

Realize that only the Supreme Self, by whom the whole universe  
is created, knows what is to be done and what is not to be done. (118)

Do not concern yourself with abundance and lack, but carry  
on the life appropriate to your caste. (119)

Your life should be conducted like the water which flows quietly  
in the channel made for it by the gardener. (120)

O Arjuna, is a chariot concerned with whether the road is  
straight or crooked? (121)

Do not take on the burden of daily activities or giving them up.  
Let your mind be solely directed towards Me. (122)

Whatever action you perform, surrender it wholeheartedly to Me,  
and do not consider whether it is great or small. (123)

Fixing your heart on Me in this way with renunciation of the  
body, you will certainly attain the state of perfect union with Me. (124)

But if you are unable even to do this, then,  
resorting to devotion to Me, and abandoning  
all the fruits of action, act with self-restraint.

If you cannot offer all your actions to Me, O Arjuna, then worship  
Me in this manner. (125)

O Arjuna, if it is hard for you to fix your heart on Me before  
intending to act, or before or after the action, (126)

Let this be. Set aside remembering Me, and direct your mind  
towards controlling the senses. (127)

Just as trees and plants drop their fruit that is ripe, in the same way  
do not consider the result of any action when it is completed. (128)

Do not worry about fixing your mind on Me or doing actions  
for My sake. Get rid of this thought. (129)

Just as nothing comes from rain which falls on a rock  
or seed which is thrown into a fire, regard your actions  
as though they were a dream. (130)

Just as a father's love for his daughter is free from passion, you  
should remain unaffected by the fruit of any action. (131)

Just as flames of fire vanish as they rise in the air, let your  
actions end in nothing. (132)

To give up the fruit of action may appear easy, yet this yoga is  
superior to all others. (133)

By giving up all attachment to their outcome, actions cease to  
bear fruit, like the bamboo tree which bears seed only once. (134)

In this manner there can be no rebirth of the body, and the  
cycle of birth and death comes to an end. (135)

O Arjuna, through climbing the ladder of practice one acquires  
understanding, and through understanding one can reach  
the stage of meditation. (136)

When all levels of feeling are merged in meditation, all activity  
is laid aside. (137)

When action ceases, one abandons its fruits,  
and through abandoning the fruits one attains peace. (138)

Therefore, O Arjuna, these are the stages in the  
attainment of supreme peace. For this reason,  
you should begin with the yoga of practice. (139)

Knowledge is indeed better than practice; meditation is superior to knowledge; renunciation of the fruit of action is better than meditation; peace immediately follows renunciation.

Knowledge is deeper than practice, O Arjuna, but meditation transcends knowledge. (140)

Selfless action is higher than meditation, but enjoyment of peace is even better than selfless action. (141)

These are the stages on the road by which one reaches peace, O great warrior. (142)

He who hates no being, friendly and compassionate, free from attachment to possessions, free from egotism, indifferent to pain and pleasure, patient,

Such a person harbours no feeling of hatred for any creature, just as the spirit of life has no sense of "myself" or "another", (143)

Just as earth does not say, "I will welcome the best man and reject the worst"; (144)

Just as life, ever kind, does not say, "I will treat well the body of a king and thrust aside that of a beggar"; (145)

Just as water makes no distinction nor says, "I will quench the thirst of a cow but kill a tiger by turning into poison"; (146)

Or just as a lamp does not give light to one household and leave others in darkness. (147)

This person gives his friendship equally to every creature and is the very source of compassion. (148)

In his mind the idea of "I" and "he" has no place. He calls nothing his own and is indifferent to either pleasure or pain. (149)

His power of forgiveness is like that of the earth, and he holds contentment in his lap. (150)

The yogi who is always contented and balanced in mind, who is self-controlled, and whose conviction is firm, whose mind and intellect are fixed on Me, and who is devoted to Me, is dear to Me.

Even without the rainy season the sea is full of water; in the same way a person is full of contentment, though he may not strive for it. (151)

He has promised to retain control over his heart and carries out his every resolution. (152)

In the palace of his heart the individual self and the Supreme are seated together in splendour. (153)

Being thus perfected in yoga, he merges his mind and will entirely in Me. (154)

He is purified both inwardly and outwardly in yoga and is wholly devoted to Me. (155)

Such a person, O Arjuna, is a true devotee, a perfect yogi, and has found liberation. His love for Me is like that of a wife for her husband. (156)

He is dearer to Me than life itself, but even this is a poor comparison. (157)

The story of the beloved is enchanting, and though it cannot be told, my love for you forces Me to speak of it. (158)

For this reason, such a simile came to My mind. Otherwise, what comparison can be found; (159)

This is enough, O Arjuna. Love is intensified by speaking of the beloved. (160)

If the speaker has a loving listener, can delight ever fade? (161)

O Arjuna, you are both the beloved and the listener, and the time has come to speak of this love. (162)

For that reason, I will speak. It is good that we have come to this happy occasion. Speaking in this way, Krishna began to sway with joy. (163)

Then again He said, Listen now to the qualities possessed by those devotees whom I hold in My heart. (164)

He from whom the world does not shrink and who does not shrink from the world, who is freed from joy, envy, fear, and distress, is dear to Me.

Just as creatures living in the water are not afraid of the sea nor the sea of them, (165)

Similarly, such a person is not distressed by the pleasure-loving world, and the world does not weary of him. (166)

Just as the body never tires of its own limbs, in the same way he is never tired of any creature, considering it his own Self. (167)

In fact, it is as though the world is his own body, so that he is free from the likes and dislikes and from joy and anger. (168)

He who is free from the pairs of opposites, from fear and depression, always remains devoted to Me. (169)

Such a person is very dear to Me. How can I describe him? He lives in My life. (170)

He is content with inner bliss, and the Supreme dwells in him. He is the lord of fulfillment. (171)

He who is free from wants, pure, capable, disinterested, free from anxiety, who has abandoned all undertakings and is devoted to Me, is dear to Me.

Such a person, O Arjuna, is free from ambition, and his very existence causes joy to increase. (172)

The Ganges is pure, and all sin and passion are purified in its waters, but one must sink in them. (173)

It is well known that Benares generously bestows liberation, but those who go there have to sacrifice the life of their bodies. (174)

All impurities disappear when one goes to the Himalayas, but it involves risking one's life. There is no such danger to the purity of a good person. (175)

The depths of devotion cannot be known unless a person drowns in them. Liberation is attained immediately even without death. (176)

The impurities of the Ganges are removed by the touch of saints. Then how great must be the purity derived from the company of such devotees? (177)

Let that be! A good person imparts his purity even to holy places and dissipates entirely all impurities of the mind. (178)

Both inwardly and outwardly he is as pure as the light of the sun. Just as a fortunate person is born with clairvoyance, he is endowed with the vision of the highest Truth. (179)

Just as the sky is limitless yet indifferent, so such a person's mind reaches everywhere; yet nothing can sully it. (180)

A bird which has escaped from a snare no longer has any fear. Similarly, he is free from worldly distress and regards everything with indifference. (181)

A person who is always contented is free from anxiety, just as a dead man feels no shame. (182)

When he undertakes anything he does so without self-consciousness, just as a fire without fuel will die out. (183)

He who is at peace within himself is already on the threshold of liberation. (184)

Filled with the sense of his oneness with God, he is about to reach the farther bank of the ocean of dualism, O Arjuna. (185)

Then, in order to enjoy the bliss of devotion, he divides himself as it were into two parts, assuming the role of devotee. (186)

The other part he calls Me and thus points out the path of devotion to those yogis who do not serve Me. (187)

Such a person is very dear to Me. He is my dwelling place, and I am not happy until I reach him. (188)

For his sake I must become incarnate, and for him I must live in his world. I feel that I should embrace him with My very life. (189)

He who neither rejoices nor hates, nor grieves nor desires, has renounced good and evil, and is full of devotion, is dear to Me.

He considers knowledge of the self the highest attainment. So he is not carried away by the enjoyment of worldly pleasures. (190)

Being at one with the whole world, he is free from any sense of separateness. Consequently, he doesn't feel any hatred. (191)

Recognizing that what is really his own can never be lost even at the end of a world age, he does not grieve for anything he may lose in this world. (192)

He recognizes that he has within himself that which is more precious than anything else, and he has no further desire. (193)

He makes no distinction between evil and good, just as the sun does not think about light and darkness. (194)

A person who has attained the highest Self-realization and who still lives in devotion to Me, (195)

Is more beloved to Me than the dearest relative. I assure you that this is true. (196)

Alike toward enemy and friend, the same in honour and disgrace, alike in cold and heat, pleasure and pain, freed from attachment.

O Arjuna, he has no sense of inequality; friends and enemies are alike to him. (197)

A tree gives the same shade to the man who planted it as to the one who strikes at its roots to fell it. (198)

Sugarcane is sweet to the one who cultivates it and equally sweet to the one who extracts its juice. (199)

A person who has the same attitude towards friends and enemies, or honour and shame. (200)

Does not vary in heat or cold, just as the sky remains the same throughout the seasons. (201)

O Arjuna, just as Mount Meru bears the north and the south winds equally, in the same way such a person remains steady whether joy or sorrow comes to him. (202)

He has the same attitude towards all creatures, just as moonlight shines with sweetness on both a king and a beggar. (203)

Just as everyone on this earth desires water, similarly, all three worlds seek him out. (204)

Laying aside all contact with inner and outer objects he lives apart with his soul absorbed in God. (205)

Just as the sky is not affected by pollution, similarly, such a person is neither offended by scorn nor elated by praise. (206)

Regarding praise and blame with equal indifference, he moves among people or in seclusion as freely as the air. (207)

Indifferent as to whether truth or untruth is spoken, he remains silent for he is absorbed in his state of freedom from illusion. (208)

He takes no delight in the satisfaction of desires, nor is he disappointed by any loss, just as the sea does not dry up when there is no rain. (209)

Just as the wind has no fixed abode, he seeks no refuge. (210)

He believes that everywhere is his home and regards himself as one with all movable and immovable things. (211)

Furthermore, O Arjuna, if he also worships Me, I place Him on my head as a crown. (212)

Is it strange that people should bow their heads before such a great being? Even the three worlds revere the water that has touched his feet. (213)

Only if Shiva Himself were a person's teacher could he know how to appreciate such great devotion. (214)

But enough of Shiva! In praising Him I would be praising Myself. (215)

This is not an adequate illustration, for I carry him upon my head. (216)

Bearing in his hands the fourth attainment of human life  
Self-realization, he treads the path of devotion, bestowing his gift on the world. (217)



Though he is able to give others the highest bliss, he takes the lowest place like water. (218)

Let us bow to him, placing him like a crown upon our heads and his feet upon our breasts. (219)

Let us beautify our speech with the jewels of his praise and adorn our ears with his fame. (220)

Desiring to see him, I have taken human eyes and worship him with a lotus in My hand. (221)

I have assumed My four-armed body so that I may embrace him. (222)

To delight in his company, I, the formless one, have become incarnate. My love for him is truly incomparable. (223)

Is it any wonder that he is so dear to Me? Those who listen to the story of his life. (224)

Those who praise the lives of the saints, are dearer to Me than My very soul. (225)

O Arjuna what I have explained to you is the entire yoga of union through devotion. (226)

It is a state so high that those who attain it are very dear to Me. I meditate on them and hold them in the highest esteem. (227)

Those who listen to this teaching which is full of beauty, sweet as a stream of nectar, and leads to righteousness, and who understand it through experience: (228)

Who have the proper state of mind, which as already been described as a seed in well-tilled soil; (229)

Who with perfect faith in its truth allow it to grow within them and practise it with all their heart; (230)

These, O Arjuna, are My beloved devotees. They alone are true yogis in this world, and for them I feel the deepest love. (231)

They are the true holy streams and sacred places. In this world those men alone are pure who give themselves up to devotion. (232)

They are the helpers of the gods and delight in caring for the world. They take pleasure in protecting those who resort to them. (233)

They are ever beneficent to their devotees and are open-hearted to those who love them. They are supporters of truth and are a store-house of all arts. (234)

Let us contemplate them as the deity whom we worship. Nothing is more pleasing to Me than such devotees. (235)

They are My delight, My treasure, and the source of My contentment. (236)

O Arjuna, I also regard as My highest deity those who speak of this devotion. (237)

These things were said by Krishna, the giver of joy to all His people, the source of all created things. (238)

O King, He who is the pure, perfect, and merciful protector of all those who take refuge in Him; (239)

Who shines with the lustre of His glory and righteousness and is famed for His boundless charity; who by His incomparable strength bound the powerful Bali; (240)

Krishna, the supreme sovereign of Vaikuntha, spoke in this way and Arjuna listened to what he said. (241)

Sanjaya said to Dhritarashtra, Listen now to what I will describe after this. (242)

This story, full of interest, will be told in the Marathi language, Listen to it earnestly. (243)

Jnanadeva says, My Guru Nivrattinath has taught me how I, should entreat you saintly men. (244)

## 2

**How the Knowledge in the Heart is Reflected on Person**

**Absence of pride, freedom from hypocrisy, non-violence, patience, rectitude, service of the teacher, purity, constancy, self-restraint.**

**Such a person doesn't strive for success in any worldly matter and feels any honour to be a burden. (184)**

**If people praise his qualities, if they show him respect or if they recognize his greatness. (185)**

**He feels embarrassed, like a deer trapped by a hunter, of a swimmer caught in a whirlpool. (186)**

**O Arjuna in the same way he is disturbed by expressions of respect and won't accept any mention of his greatness. (187)**

**He doesn't want to see any sign of his worthiness or to hear any word of fame. He prefers that others not remember him as having any special qualities. (188)**

**Such a person has no wish to receive respect or honour. He prefers death to receiving a salutation. (189)**

**Like Brihaspati, he possesses all knowledge, yet for fear of greatness he hides among mad men. (190)**

**He conceals his knowledge, makes no use of his high attainments, and prefers to be considered mad. (191)**

**Worldly fame distresses him, he dislikes learned discussion, and chooses to live in silence. (192)**

**He prefers to be ignored and doesn't want his own relatives to notice him. This is the way he likes to live. (193)**

**He behaves in such a way that people will consider him lowly. Humility is like a jewel to him. (194)**

**He tries to live in such a way that people will be unaware of whether he is alive or dead. (195)**

He desires that people should never know whether he walks by himself or whether he is propelled by the wind. (196)

He prefers that his existence should be hidden and his name unknown, so that no creature will fear him. (197)

A person who has taken such vows always lives in seclusion and delights in the idea of solitude. (198)

He is content with the company of the wind, takes pleasure in conversing with the sky, and loves trees as his own life. (199)

A person in whom these characteristics are found is the intimate companion of knowledge. (200)

A person's humility is known by these characteristics. Now I will tell you how to recognize unpretentiousness. (201)

This quality is like the mind of a miser who refuses to reveal his hidden treasure, even though his life may be threatened. (202)

Similarly, O Arjuna, an unpretentious person will never reveal by word or gesture, even at the risk of his life, any good action that he may perform. (203)

O Arjuna, a vicious cow drives her calf away, a prostitute tries to conceal her advancing age. (204)

A rich man overtaken in a forest hides his wealth, a girl of noble birth conceals her limbs. (205)

And a farmer covers the seed sown in the ground. In the same way, such a person remains silent about his charitable deeds. (206)

He doesn't adorn his body to impress others, he abstains from flattery, and he doesn't boast of his righteousness. (207)

He doesn't speak of the good he has done to others. He doesn't display his knowledge, nor will he sell it for the sake of fame. (208)

He is miserly concerning bodily pleasure; yet when it comes to charity, he doesn't count the cost. (209)

There is always poverty in his household and his body is very thin, but when there is a need for charity, he rivals the wish-fulfilling tree. (210)

He is noble in performing his duty and is generous when the occasion demands. He is skillful at discussing the Self, yet at other times he appears to be mad. (211)

The trunk of the plantain tree seems to be light and hollow, yet when the fruit is formed it is firm and sweet. (212)

Clouds may look light in weight and may be easily driven before the wind, yet they can send down torrents of rain. (213)

If one studies such a person closely, one sees that he is completely satisfied, although outwardly he seems to lack everything. (214)

I have said enough. Understand that a person in whom these qualities are fully present has acquired wisdom. (215)

All this is called unpretentiousness. Now listen to the signs of harmlessness. (216)

Listen how different schools of thought have described this quality according to their various opinions. (217)

As if a person should break off the branches of a tree to build a fence around the trunk, (218)

Cut off his arm and sell it in order to satisfy his hunger, or demolish a temple and use the stones to build a wall around the deity, (219)

Similarly, the ritualists hold that harmlessness can be cultivated by slaughtering animals as a sacrifice. (220)

When the earth is suffering from a lack of water, they offer various sacrifices so it will rain. (221)

The basis of these sacrifices is the slaughter of animals. How can harmlessness be practised in this way? (222)

If the taking of life is the seed that is sown, how  
can harmlessness spring from it? O Arjuna, how great  
is the presumption of those ritualists! (223)

O Arjuna, the whole science of Vedic medicine is equally  
strange in this respect, for in order to save one life  
it prescribes the taking of another. (224)

When people suffer from disease and groan with pain,  
this science prescribes medicine to remove it. (225)

To prepare this treatment, plants are dug up or entirely  
uprooted. (226)

Sometimes trees are cut through to the centre, or the  
bark may be removed. Sometimes the centre  
is boiled in a cauldron. (227)

O Arjuna, some who know nothing of enmity are struck in  
such a way that they wither and die. (228)

Sometimes bile is taken from the bodies of animals and  
used for treating other suffering creatures. (229)

All this is like tearing down good houses to build temples  
and shrines, or robbing traders to set up houses for the  
free distribution of food. (230)

It is as though a person were to wrap a cloth around  
his head and leave the rest of his body naked, or as if  
a house were demolished to build a large shed. (231)

It is like a person who sets his clothes on fire in order  
to warm himself, or like the bathing of an elephant. (232)

It is like selling cattle to build a cattle pen, or setting  
a parrot free and then making a cage to keep it in. Are such  
things done seriously or as a joke? Should we laugh at them? (233)

Some people strain the water they drink as a religious  
practice, and many lives are lost in the process. (234)

There are others who refuse to cook grain for fear of  
doing harm. In this way they torment the body, and  
that is also harmful. (235)

O wise Arjuna, harmlessness and destruction both amount to the same thing in the code of the ritualists. You should realize this. (236)

When I began to explain harmlessness, I intended to describe its true characteristics. (237)

Then I thought I shouldn't avoid mentioning these different views regarding it, so that you could know them also. (238)

This is all inherent in the subject. Otherwise, you will be led astray. (239)

Moreover, O Arjuna, in order to establish fully one's point of view, one must also understand others' opinions. (240)

This is the method of explanation. Now listen carefully, for this is the most important point. (241)

I will now express My own views so that you may understand the inner meaning of harmlessness. (242)

Whether or not a person has fully understood the nature of harmlessness may be judged from his daily life, just as a touchstone reveals any inferior quality in gold. (243)

As soon as the the mind and knowledge come together, the mind receives the imprint of harmlessness. (244)

Avoiding any disturbance of the waves, without breaking the ripples with its legs or agitating the calm surface, (245)

A crane passes through the water swiftly but cautiously watching its prey. (246)

A bee alights gently on a lotus flower, so that the pollen won't be disturbed. (247)

In the same say, a person who is imbued with harmlessness, believing that the smallest atom is full of minute lives, walks over the ground softly and with compassion. (248)

He bestows kindness as he goes and spreads goodwill in all directions, protecting other creatures with his own life. (249)

O Arjuna, a person who walks with such care is beyond praise,  
and no words do justice to him. (250)

A mother cat lovingly carries her kittens in her  
mouth, and although her sharp teeth touch them, they are not hurt. (251)

When an affectionate mother waits for her child, her  
eyes fill with tenderness. (252)

When a person gently fans himself with a lotus leaf, the  
cool wind refreshes his eyes. (253)

Similarly, a person who practises harmlessness steps  
gently upon the ground and joy comes to all mankind. (254)

O Arjuna when such a person, walking quietly, notices a  
worm or an insect in his path, he turns back. (255)

He feels that if he should tread heavily, he might  
disturb someone's sleep and interrupt his peace. (256)

In his compassion, he should turn back and wouldn't  
harm anyone. (257)

He doesn't step on a blade of grass, for there is life  
within it. How then could he unwittingly cause harm  
to any creature? (258)

Just as it would be impossible for an ant to cross over  
Mount Meru or a gnat to swim across the ocean, similarly,  
he couldn't step on any creature he might meet. (259)

His behaviour is like the fruit of kindness, and his  
speech is full of compassion. (260)

His breathing is calm, his face is the source of all  
affection, and even his teeth seem to send forth sweetness. (261)

Even before he begins to speak love springs from him,  
and compassion expresses itself before he says a word. (262)

He prefers not to speak, for fear that he may hurt  
someone's feelings. (263)



He avoids speaking unnecessarily, so that no one will  
be distressed or caused to suffer doubts. (264)

So that his words may not distract anyone from his  
work, or cause anyone to fear or scorn him. (265)

He maintains silence so that he won't hurt others'  
feelings or cause them to frown. This is his attitude. (266)

If he is ever requested to speak, he speaks with  
affection, and those who listen feel he is their parent. (267)

His words sound like the resonant voice of God, or the  
waters of the Ganges. They are as chaste as a virtuous  
wife who has grown old. (268)

His words are tender and true, moderate and sincere,  
like waves of nectar. (269)

His speech is free from sarcasm, hurting no one, never  
provoking ridicule or wounding deeply. (270)

In his speech there is no agitation or haste, no guile  
or false hope, doubt, or deceit. He avoids such faults. (271)

O Arjuna, his look is steady and his brow unwrinkled. (272)

He believes that the universal spirit is in all  
beings, so he usually avoids looking at them lest  
this Spirit be harmed. (273)

If his inner kindliness compels him to look at another, (274)

His glance brings comfort, just as moonbeams, though  
invisible, brings satisfaction to the chakora bird. (275)

The effect of his look on all creatures is such that  
even the tortoise doesn't know the depth of its tenderness. (276)

You will see that the hands of a person who looks at  
another in this way are equally harmless. (277)

His hands are as still as those of a person who has  
attained his goal and has no further desire. (278)

Just as something that cannot last is given up, as a fire without  
fuel ceases to burn, or as a mute person must remain silent, (279)

Similarly, this man's hands apparently have nothing  
to do, so they remain at rest. (280)

He doesn't move his hands lest the wind receive a  
shock, or the sky be pierced by his nails. (281)

Then how could he brush away a fly settling on his  
body or gnats buzzing around his eyes? How could  
he frighten birds or beasts with his glance? (282)

O Arjuna, how could he pick up a weapon when he is  
unwilling to grasp even a stick in his hand? (283)

He avoids playing with a lotus, or tossing a garland  
of flowers, as this would seem to him like playing with a sling. (284)

He won't pass his hand over his body lest he cause the  
hair on it to tremble, and he allows his nails to grow  
until they wrap around his fingers. (285)

Normally his hands are inactive, but if he had occasion  
to use them, he folds them. (286)

He raises them to reassure the fearful, to raise the  
fallen or to help the distressed. (287)

Even though he does this reluctantly, he helps those in  
distress or fear. Even moonbeams cannot know the  
tenderness of his touch. (288)

Compared with the gentleness with which he touches animals,  
even the breeze from the Malaya mountains would seem harsh. (289)

His hands are always empty and free like the sandalwood tree,  
which cannot be called barren though it bears no fruit. (290)

But I have said enough. The hands of a good person  
are gentle, like his character. (291)

Now if I were to tell you truly about such a person's  
mind, I would say, "Of whose activity have I spoken?" (292)

Aren't the branches one with the tree?  
Can there be an ocean without water?  
Is there any difference between the sun and its light? (293)

Are the limbs of a body separate from it in any way?  
Are water and wetness different from each other? (294)

Similarly, all these outer expressions which I have  
described are only manifestations of the mind. (295)

Just as the seed sown in the ground becomes a tree  
the mind manifests itself through the senses. (296)

If harmlessness has no place in the mind, how can it  
find any outer expression? (297)

O Arjuna, whatever inclination may arise, it is first awakened  
in the mind. Then it is passed on either to the speech, the  
eye, or the hand. (298)

How can anything that isn't first in the mind express  
itself through the body? Can a sprout grow  
in the ground without a seed? (299)

How can a stream flow if its source dries up? How can a lifeless  
body be active? (300)

In the same way, as soon as the mind stops functioning, the  
senses become inactive, just as puppets are motionless when  
there is no puppeteer holding the strings. (301)

O Arjuna, the mind is the mainspring of all sensory  
activities, and it works through the channel of the senses. (302)

Whenever there is any impulse in the mind, it is expressed  
through the channel of the senses. (303)

When harmlessness is established in the mind, it radiates outward just as fragrance pours out of a flower. (304)

In this way the senses carry out the activity of harmlessness, spending freely its abundant riches. (305)

Just as the water of the ocean at high tide flows into every inlet, similarly, the mind pours out its wealth through the sense. (306)

Enough! Just as a teacher holds a child's hand and easily writes a line of words, (307)

In the same way, the mind transmits its kindliness to the hands and feet, and through them it brings about harmlessness. (308)

Therefore, O Arjuna, know that by describing the activity of the senses, the activity of the mind is also described. (309)

When you see that person has entirely renounced harmfulness in speech, thought, or outer action, (310)

Understand that he is a storehouse of wisdom. Truly, he is very incarnation of wisdom. (311)

If you want to understand harmlessness, which is heard, spoken, and written of in books, you only have to look at such a person. (312)

Jnanadeva says, I should have told you in a few words what the Lord said. Forgive me for explaining this at such length: (313)

Cattle which are put to graze in a green pasture constantly move onwards, leaving what lies behind. Birds flying with the wind are lost in the sky. (314)

Similarly, inspired by the theme and tested by poetic feeling, my mind was carried away. (315)

But listen! There is a better reason for this explanation. Otherwise, the word harmlessness itself consists of only a few syllables. (316)

Harmlessness seems like a small thing, but one can explain it clearly only when one considers all the views regarding it. (317)

If I were to explain harmlessness without referring to the various opinions held about it, you wouldn't accept my explanation. (318)

If a common stone were taken to an expert jeweler, he would throw it away. It would be futile to praise it. (319)

Just think, in a market where they judge the scent of camphor, could anyone sell flowers as a substitute? (320)

Gentlemen, in an assembly such as this, a flow of eloquent words would elicit no response. (321)

You would listen to me only if I spoke of both the general and particular theories about this subject. (322)

Moreover, if I mingled the purity of the explanation with the turbid waters of doubt, your attention would be distracted. (323)

Do swans seek out water covered with weeds? (324)

The chakora bird won't open its beak to feed on moonbeams if the moon shines through a cloudy sky. (325)

Likewise, if my explanation weren't beyond dispute, not only would you reject it, but it would provoke your anger. (326)

If this discourse didn't help you to understand or dispel your doubts, you wouldn't accept it. (327)

I have undertaken all this writing for the purpose of pleasing you, saintly people. (328)

Knowing how deeply interested you are in understanding the Gita, I have held it faithfully in my heart. (329)

I feel sure that you are ready to give all you have and to abandon everything in order to gain the knowledge of the teachings of the Gita. For this reason, my work is a pledge of your kindness. (330)

On the other hand, if you only consider your own interest and disregard the search for liberation then listen, the Gita and I will meet the same fate. (331)

In short I wish to win your favour and I have written this book for that purpose. (332)

I decided to speak of the various opinions about this doctrine so that I could find a discourse which would appeal to you, appreciative listeners, (333)

So I have made this digression and set aside the meaning of the verses. Forgive me for this for I am your child. (334)

It takes time to remove sand from rice, but there is no fault in that for it must be removed. (335)

If a child delays coming home in order to avoid running into a thief, should his mother be angry with him or should she perform the ceremony to preserve his life; (336)

But my discourse hasn't been like this, and it is good that you have been tolerant with me. Now listen to what the Lord said. (337)

O Arjuna, if you want to have the vision of wisdom, pay attention to Me. I will explain to you how to recognize wisdom. (338)

You may recognize wisdom in a person who has patience without intolerance. (339)

He is like a lotus on the surface of a deep lake, or wealth in the house of a fortunate person. (340)

O Arjuna, I will tell you clearly the characteristics of one who possesses forbearance. (341)

He patiently bears all things, just as a person wears his favourite ornaments. (342)

Even if calamity should come to him, he wouldn't be overwhelmed by it. (343)

His attitude is one of glad acceptance, whether he obtains what he wants or what he doesn't want. (344)

He bears with equanimity both honour and shame, he is the same in happiness and in sorrow, and he isn't affected differently by praise or blame. (345)

He isn't scorched by heat, nor does he shiver with cold. He isn't intimidated by anything. (346)

Just as Mount Meru doesn't feel the weight of its own peaks, nor does the boar feel the burden of the earth. (347)

And just as the entire creation doesn't weigh down the earth, in the same way, he doesn't sweat under the pairs of opposites. (348)

Just as the ocean swells to receive the water of all the rivers flowing into it. (349)

Similarly, there is nothing that such a person cannot bear with equanimity, and he has no memory even of what he has suffered. (350)

Whatever happens to his body he accepts as his own, and he takes no credit for what he suffers. (351)

O Arjuna, he who practises such quiet endurance adds greatness to wisdom. (352)

O Arjuna, that person is the essence of wisdom. Now listen as I tell you about uprightness. (353)

It is like the generosity of the vital force, which has the same attitude of benevolence towards all. (354)

The sun sheds its light without discrimination. The sky, too, gives its space to all. (355)

Similarly, this person's attitude doesn't change with different people. His behaviour is the same towards all. (356)

The whole world seems familiar to him, as if all men were his close friends. He has no thought of "himself" and "others". (357)

He meets with everyone, just as water mixes with anything.  
His mind turns against no one in any matter. (358)

Like the swiftly moving wind, his mind is straightforward.  
Doubt and hope don't exist for it. (359)

Just as a child doesn't hesitate to come to its mother,  
such a person freely expresses his thoughts to others. (360)

O Arjuna, he doesn't spend his life in concealment,  
but lives as a full-blown lotus which freely spreads its fragrance. (361)

Like a pure jewel whose lustre shines from its surface,  
his pure mind always goes ahead of his actions. (362)

He doesn't need to think ahead. He is satisfied in the  
experience of union, and his heart is free and candid. (363)

His glance is frank and open, his speech is sincere, and  
he bears malice towards no one. (364)

All his senses are pure, and his five *pranas* are unres-  
tricted throughout the twenty-four hours of the day. (365)

His heart is as honest as a stream of nectar. Truly, he  
is the very source of honesty. (366)

O Arjuna, such a person is the embodiment of uprightness,  
and wisdom has made its home in him. (367)

Now, O Arjuna, I will explain to you the nature of  
devotion to the Guru. (368)

How devotion is the mother of prosperity, and how it  
makes even a distressed person reach the Absolute, (369)

I will now explain to you. Pay close attention. (370)

Just as the Ganges enters the ocean with all the wealth  
of its waters, just as the scriptures all culminate in the Supreme. (371)

Just as a wife surrenders her whole being to her husband,  
with all her virtues and faults, (372)



Similarly, a person who is devoted to his Guru offers to him all that he has, and makes of himself a temple of devotion. (373)

Just as a wife parted from her husband constantly thinks of him, the devotee always remembers the place where his Guru lives. (374)

He runs to welcome the breeze that blows from his Guru's house and meeting it he begs it to enter his own home. (375)

Carried away by love, he takes delight in directing his speech only towards the Guru's house, for in his mind that is where he resides. (376)

He lives in his own home only to obey the Guru's command, like a calf tied with a rope. (377)

He continually wonders when the rope will break so he can see his Guru. His separation from his Guru seems longer than a world age. (378)

If anyone should come to him from his Guru or brings a message from him, he feels like a dead person brought back to life. (379)

Like parched sprouts that are showered with nectar, like a small fish from a pond that finds itself in the ocean, (380)

Like a poor man who sees a hidden treasure, a blind man who recovers his sight, or a beggar who is raised up to the throne of Indra, (381)

The mention of his Guru's house fills him with joy, and he expands so much that he can easily embrace the whole sky. (382)

When you see a person who has this kind of love for his Guru's house, you will realize that wisdom itself is his servant. (383)

Through the force of love in his heart, he worships and meditates on his Guru's form. (384)

In his pure heart, he makes a temple for his Guru and sets him in the place of honour. With his heart and soul, he himself becomes everything that is needed for worship. (385)

In the courtyard of his awareness, within the temple of his joy, he sprinkles the image of his Guru with the nectar of meditation. (386)

When the sun of enlightenment dawns, he fills the basket of his intelligence with the flowers of pure feelings and offers them to Shankar in the form of his Guru. (387)

At all three appointed times for worship, he burns the incense of his inner Self and waves around it the lamp of wisdom. (388)

He constantly offers to his Guru the food of union with the Self. He becomes the worshipper and makes his Guru the object of his worship. (389)

It is as though his inner heart were the bed on which the Guru, as a husband, enjoys union with him, and he delights in that love. (390)

When at times his heart overflows with love, it resembles the Milky Ocean. (391)

For him, the bliss of meditation on his Guru is like the bed of the cobra Shesha on which his Guru is sleeping. (392)

He becomes Lakshmi, bathing the feet of Vishnu in the form of his Guru, or he may become Garuda, standing in his presence. (393)

In his love for his Guru he pictures himself as Brahma, being born from the navel of Vishnu. Through this desire, he experiences the bliss of meditation. (394)

Sometimes in the intensity of his love, he imagines that his Guru is his mother, and he is lying in her lap while being fed. (395)

O Arjuna, he may think of his Guru as a cow standing under the tree of consciousness and picture himself as her calf. (396)

At times he imagines himself as a fish swimming in the waters of his Guru's love, (397)

Or he may feel like a plant being showered with the nectar of the Guru's grace. There is no end to the fantasies that arise in his mind. (398)

Sometimes his love is so boundless that he imagines himself  
as a fledgling bird and the Guru as the mother bird. (399)

Again, he imagines his Guru as the mother bird feeding him  
with her beak, or he pictures the Guru as a boat to which  
he is clinging for support in the water. (400)

Just as wave after wave arises on the ocean, similarly, one  
meditation follows another through the depth of his love. (401)

In this way, he always enjoys contemplating the Guru's  
image in his heart. Now I will tell you how he serves the  
Guru outwardly. (402)

He always feels, I will serve my Guru so well that he  
will become pleased with me and tell me to ask him for a boon. (403)

When my Guru becomes pleased with my devotion, I will  
humbly ask him. (404)

O Master, I want to become all your servants. (405)

I want to become all the things you need for worship. (406)

This is the boon that I would ask of him. If he agreed,  
I would minister to his every need. (407)

If I myself became all the things he needs for worship,  
he would appreciate my devotion to him. (408)

Although the Guru is the mother of all his disciples,  
I will put such pressure on him through serving him in  
all ways that he will be my mother alone. (409)

I will draw his love so strongly that he will be like a  
husband devoted to only one wife. In this way, I will  
make him take the vow of remaining in only one place, and  
the Guru's love will always be directed to me alone. (410)

Just as the winds can never pass beyond the limits of the  
four quarters, I will become a cage to ensnare all of my  
Guru's benevolence. (411)

All the ornaments of my virtues I will offer to his service as to a queen, and I will be the only vessel of devotion to him. (412)

I will become the deep earth on which the Guru's love falls like showers of rain. (413)

I will become the Guru's house. I will be his servant and do all work. (414)

I will be the threshold of the door over which my Guru passes when entering or leaving his house. I will both be the door and his door-keeper. (415)

I will become his shoes and will also put them on his feet. I will become his umbrella as well as the one who holds it. (416)

I will be his herald and the one who holds his fly whisk. I will be his forerunner. (417)

I will prepare his betel nut and serve his personal needs. I will make the preparations for his bath. (418)

I will become the seat on which he rests, his garments, his ornaments, sandalwood paste, and all other articles for his use. (419)

I will be his cook, will serve his food, and will myself become the lamp which is waved before him. (420)

When my Guru takes his meals I will be his companion, and when the meal is over I will come forward to offer him his betel nut roll. (421)

I will remove the dishes, make his bed, and massage his feet. (422)

I will become his throne. Thus I will serve him in every way. (423)

I will be the subject on which he meditates. (424)

I will be all the words that may fall on his ear, and the sensation he feels when something touches his body. (425)

I will become whatever object the Guru looks at with love. (426)

I will become whatever taste his tongue savours, and  
whatever fragrance pleases his nose. (427)

In this way, becoming everything in the world, I will  
surround my Guru with every conceivable form of service. (428)

As long as my body lasts, I will serve him in this way;  
and after death I will still long to do so. (429)

I will mix the earth element of my body with the earth  
on which the feet of my Guru walks. (430)

I will mix the water elements of my body with the water  
touched by my Guru's hand. (431)

I will merge the fiery element of my body with the flame  
of the lamp that lights my Guru's house and with the  
flame that is waved before him in worship. (432)

I will place my vital force by my Guru's fan so I will  
serve his body. (433)

I will merge the etheric element of my body into the space  
wherever my Guru's form may be. (434)

Alive or dead, I will never stop serving my Guru, nor let  
anyone else serve him even for a moment. For many  
lifetimes I will serve him like this. (435)

A disciple has this kind of eagerness, and he is incompa-  
rable in his service. (436)

When he is serving, he doesn't think about day or night,  
nor does he regard any service as either greater or less.  
The harder the work the Guru gives him, the happier  
he becomes. (437)

When the Guru calls him to work he feels greater than  
the sky, and he takes delight in serving alone. (438)

The moment he receives the Guru's command to perform any  
service, his body outruns his mind, competing with it to  
finish the work quickly. (439)

At any time he is ready to sacrifice his entire life for the slightest whim of his Master. (440)

His body may become emaciated by this service to his Guru, but he is nourished by his love for the Guru and is the abode of his Guru's command. (441)

He is noble by virtue of the nobility of his Guru's family, he is kind through their kindness, and he is diligent because of his preoccupation with serving his Guru. (442)

He regards as his daily duties those things that belong to his Guru's religious tradition, and devotes himself solely to serving him. (443)

He regards the Guru as a holy place, his deity mother, and father, and knows no other path than service to him. (444)

It is the joy of his life to live in his Guru's house, and he loves others who serve the Guru as his own brothers. (445)

The repetition of the Guru's name is his only prayer, and his only scripture is his Guru's words. (446)

For him the water that touches his Guru's feet embraces all the holy places in the three worlds. (447)

If he should find some of the leftovers of his Guru's meal, they would be a feast far more sumptuous for him than even the bliss of samadhi. (448)

O Arjuna, he would take a speck of the dust raised by his Guru's feet as the price with which to obtain eternal joy. (449)

What more can I say? His devotion is boundless. Out of overpowering inspiration, I have described it in this way. (450)

A person who has this kind of devotion and who enjoys nothing but serving the Guru. (451)

Is a treasurehouse of wisdom. Wisdom is even honoured by his existence. He is a god and wisdom is his devotee. (452)

Wisdom enters him through open doors and lives in him.  
It is enough to satisfy the whole world. (453)

Jnanadeva says, My soul takes delight in serving my Guru.  
This is why I have explained it in such detail. (454)

Otherwise, if I am not occupied in serving him, I am  
helpless even though I have hands, I am blind to worship  
even though I have eyes, and I am less able than a lame man  
to walk around the temple. (455)

I am mute in praising his glory even though I have a voice,  
an idler who eats other's food. Yet in my heart I have the  
sincere desire to serve him. (456)

This is what has compelled me to become involved in this  
long explanation. (457)

I, Jnanadeva, ask you to forgive me and allow me to  
serve you. Now I will continue this explanation in a better way. (458)

Listen, O Arjuna, Lord Krishna, the incarnation of  
Vishnu and the bearer of the weight of the earth, spoke as follows: (459)

Now I will speak of purity. The body and mind of a pure  
person are as pure as camphor. (460)

He is as clear as a jewel and as radiant as the sun. (461)

His good actions make his body clean, while inwardly he  
is enlightened by his wisdom. Thus he is full of purity. (462)

According to the rules of the Vedas, water and earth  
cleanse a person outwardly. (463)

The dust on the mirror of the mind is cleansed by the intellect,  
just as stains on cloth are removed by the washerman's soap. (464)

Similarly, a person is pure if he is outwardly clean and  
has the light of wisdom in his heart. (465)

Otherwise, O Arjuna, if the heart is not pure, the display  
of outer effort serves only to deceive others. (466)

It would be like adorning a dead body, bathing a donkey in  
a holy river, sprinkling a bitter pumpkin with sugar, (467)

Hanging flags on a deserted house, pasting food on the  
body of a starving man, or putting kumkum on a widow. (468)

A gilded dome is hollow and its glitter is worthless.  
What is the use of painting an imitation fruit made of cow dung? (469)

This is how it is with an impure man and his outer actions.  
Inferior merchandise cannot be sold for a high price. (470)

When wisdom enters the heart, outer cleanliness naturally follows.  
How can wisdom arise merely by performing external actions? (471)

The body is purified through spiritual practices, and  
inner impurities are cleansed through wisdom. (472)

Then the distinction between outside and inside vanishes,  
and purity alone remains. (473)

The pure qualities of the inner Self shine through the  
senses, like a flame enclosed in a crystal lamp. (474)

Even if such a person sees, hears, or encounters things  
that ordinarily give rise to doubts and evil thoughts or  
sow the seeds of bad actions, (475)

They don't affect his mind any more than the sky is  
tainted by the colour of the clouds. (476)

Although his senses may enjoy sense objects, he is not  
contaminated by passion. (477)

He remains completely untouched by these things, just as a  
high caste and a low caste woman meet on the road without  
coming in contact with each other. (478)

A woman embraces both her husband and her son, yet her son  
arouses no passion in her. (479)



In the same way, good and evil desires never seep into a pure-hearted person. He knows which actions are right and which are wrong. (480)

Just as water cannot permeate a diamond and sand cannot be cooked in boiling water, his heart cannot be contaminated by any kind of evil thought. (481)

O Arjuna, this state is known as purity, and you should know that wisdom dwells here. (482)

A person in whom steadfastness resides is the life of wisdom. (483)

His body may perform many kinds of actions, but the equanimity of his mind is never disturbed. (484)

A cow doesn't lose her affection for her calf even when she wanders in a forest. A devout wife who burns herself on her husband's funeral pyre takes no pleasure in the ornaments she is wearing. (485)

The heart of a miser remains with his buried treasure no matter how far he may go from it. Similarly, the mind of a steadfast person is not disturbed when his body moves from one place to another. (486)

The sky doesn't move with the fleeting clouds, the pole star remains fixed while the other stars revolve around it. (487)

And when travellers walk, the road itself doesn't move nor do the trees leave their places, O Arjuna. (488)

In the same way, even while his body is being activated by the five elements, the mind of a pure person is not disturbed by waves of feelings. (489)

Just as the earth is not shaken by the force of a hurricane, likewise, such a person is not disturbed by the swirl of calamity. (490)

He is not distressed by the misery of poverty, he is never overwhelmed by fear or sorrow, nor does he dread the death of the body. (491)

His mind remains steady and is not swayed by hope,  
anxiety, disease, or old age. (492)

Not even a hair of his body is disturbed when he is assaulted by  
contempt and dishonour, or confronted with passion and desire. (493)

Even though the sky may fall on him or the earth crumble,  
his mind remains unshaken. (494)

Just as an elephant isn't driven away by throwing flowers at it,  
likewise, he isn't wounded by the arrows of harsh words. (495)

Mount Mandara isn't moved by the waves of the Milky Ocean,  
and the sky isn't consumed by a forest fire. (496)

Similarly, no matter how many waves of passion may arise,  
his mind isn't disturbed. He remains courageous and patient  
even if the world comes to an end. (497)

O Arjuna, this state of mind which I have described in  
such detail is called steadfastness. (498)

A person whose heart and mind acquire this kind of  
steadfastness is an open treasure of wisdom. (499)

A greedy man thinks only of his home, a warrior clutches  
his weapons, a miser clings to his wealth, (500)

A mother thinks only of her child, and a bee is always  
greedy for honey. (501)

Similarly, O Arjuna, such a person keeps strict  
watch over his mind and doesn't allow it to stand  
at the threshold of the senses. (502)

He always fears that some passionate creature or some  
fiend of desire may hear, see, and take hold of his heart. (503)

Just as an outraged husband confines his unruly  
wife to the house, so a pure person keeps watch  
over his mental tendencies. (504)

He controls his senses, mortifies his body, and performs  
all actions with restraint. (505)

At the doorway of his mind, he turns his senses within  
and restrains his activities. (506)

In the three centres--*muladhara* at the base of the spine,  
*manipura* at the navel, and *vishuddha* at the throat--he  
performs the three yogic *bandhas*--*mula*, *uddiyana*, and  
*jalandhara*--and focuses his mind at the junction of  
the *ida* and *pingala nadis*. (507)

He puts meditations to sleep on the couch of *samadhi*,  
and his mind becomes one with Consciousness. (508)

Know that such a person has mastered his heart. When  
this happens wisdom rises supreme. (509)

A person whose heart obeys his every command should be  
considered wisdom incarnate. (510)

From *Jnaneshvari*, 13th century

Tr. by Swami Kripinand

### 3

#### Prayer to the Universal God

May the Self of the universe be pleased with this  
sacrifice of words and bestow His grace on me! (1772)

May sinners no longer commit evil deeds, may their  
desire to do good increase, and may all beings live in  
harmony with one another! (1773)

May the darkness of sin disappear, may the world see  
the rising of the sun of righteousness, and may the  
desires of all creatures be satisfied! (1774)

May everyone keep the company of saints devoted to  
God, who will shower their blessings on them! (1775)

Saints are walking gardens filled with wish-fulfilling  
trees, and they are living villages of wish-fulfilling  
gems. Their words are like oceans of nectar. (1776)

They are moons without blemish and suns without heat.  
May these saints be the friends of all people. (1777)

May all beings in all the worlds be filled with joy,  
and may they worship God for ever. (1778)

May all those for whom this book is their very life be  
blessed with success in this world and the next. (1779)

Then Nivrittinath, the great Master said this blessing  
will be granted. This brought great joy to Jnaneshwar. (1780)

All this took place in Kali Yuga in the country of  
the Marathas, on the south bank of the Godavari River, (1781)

In the most holy place in all the three worlds,  
ten miles long, where the god Shri Mahalaya,  
the life of the world, lives. (1782)

There Lord Ramachandra, the king of the universe,  
ruled with justice. He was the delight of the Yadava race  
and the abode of all the arts. (1783)

There Jnanadeva, descended from the lineage  
of Shankara and his disciple Nivrittinath, adorned  
the Gita with the Marathi language. (1784)

The Gita is the conversation between Lord Krishna  
and Arjuna, and was narrated in the famous Bhishma  
Parva of the Mahabharata. (1785)

This conversation contains the essence of the teachings  
of the Upanishads and is the home of all sciences.  
It is the lake in which the most advanced  
ascetics take pleasure. (1786)

Jnanadeva, the disciple of Nivritti, says that this  
eighteenth chapter is the supreme pinnacle of the Gita. (1787)

Through the wealth of merit in this work, may all  
creatures be filled with supreme joy  
forever and ever. (1788)

## Oneness of God and the Devotee

Below are stanzas 740-767 from *Amṛitanubhava* (Amṛtānubhava, the Nectar Experience).

Now, God himself performs  
the worship of God  
giving various names  
by way of offerings (740)

If God and the temple and the entire retinue of Gods  
can be carved out of a single mountain-rock  
why shouldn't the transaction of Bhakti be  
in this fashion? (741)

Behold! the whole tree  
is the only tree.  
It has no expanse  
other than itself. (742)

Look whether the dumb makes the vow of observing pious  
silence or not. What exists is silence.

So, whether the devotee indulges in worship or not,  
either—his indulgence or non-indulgence—is worship. (743)

The goddess made of the consecrated rice,  
if not worshipped, is the consecrated rice.  
With the consecrated rice, then,  
what can indeed be worshipped? (744)

Futile is it to tell the flame of a lamp  
to wear the garment of lustre;  
as though, without telling so,  
the flame will remain bare. (745)

If you ask the moon  
to wear moon-light,  
will the moon who is moon-light herself  
indeed be invisible? (746)

Fieriness is inherent in fire,  
isn't it meaningless, then,  
to lend or deny fieriness to fire? (747)

So, when the devotee worships God, it is worship;  
and when he doesn't, is it no worship?  
It is never so, for,  
the devotee is the holy Shiva himself. (748)

So, now, devotion and non-devotion  
have become one plate in the same row  
the wicks of the deed and the non-deed  
having been put out. (749)

Therefore, the praise sung by the Upanishads  
becomes the censure  
And that very censure when made explicit  
turns out to be a song of praise. (750)

Anyhow, the censure and the praise  
both fade into silence.  
So the expression through language  
is silence observed by silence itself. (751)

Even if the devotee sets his foot in any direction,  
it is a pilgrimage to Shiva.  
Hence, even if he goes on a pilgrimage,  
he has not gone anywhere. (752)

The devotee experiences his own expanse everywhere,  
Therefore, for him, walking and sitting,  
both are one and the same!  
What an event, this is! (753)

Let any devotee merely cast a glance  
anywhere anytime,  
He will experience the festivity of seeing Shiva  
anywhere anytime. (754)

Even if the devotee looks at Shiva  
he sees nothing,  
for here God and the devotee  
are of equal stature (755)

Of itself does a ball fall,  
then it bounces up on its own,  
and on its own  
it falls again (756)

If such playing of a ball  
is seen anytime,  
the amusement of the enlightened  
can be understood or explained. (757)

Action cannot touch the way of devotion  
nor has knowledge  
any connection with it:  
such is the nature of devotion (758)

Nothing new is born  
nor is anything destroyed;  
The body experiences the body itself;  
The happiness of this is comparable to happiness itself. (759)

This is the secret  
of natural *bhakti*  
To this land  
come the Yogas, knowledge and all to rest. (760)

Hari and Hara have become one single body here;  
the difference, existing only in the name and form,  
has vanished  
as it was originally one. (761)

The Ardhanari Nateshwar are  
engaged in the act  
of mutual swallowing.  
Both swallow each other entirely. (762)

The referred is eaten away,  
the referer is swallowed too.  
Both thus fade into  
*para* language. (763)

O Shiva, the almighty Swami,  
You have given us this strength  
so that we can give and take  
this land of happiness. (764)

The already awake is woken up by you,  
the already asleep is lulled to sleep by you.  
On my own have I enlightened myself  
What a miracle you are! (765)

I am purely yours  
 on top of it you fondly call me yours!  
 Such a divine tautology  
 befits you only. (766)

You take nothing from anyone;  
 nor do you give anything of yours to anyone;  
 who knows what kind of greatness  
 you possess! (767)

From *Amritanubhava*, 13th century

Tr. by Pradeep Gopal Deshpande

5

### Abhangas

*i*

The clouds make a sonorous sound;  
 the wind makes a tinkling sound;  
 this Kanha<sup>1</sup> who saves all from worldly life:  
 make him meet me immediately

The moon and the moonlight,  
 the *chafa* flower and the sandalwood  
 are not to my liking  
 in the absence of Devakinandan

The bed of flowers  
 is cool indeed,  
 but, for me, it is like wet fire;  
 put it out immediately.

You are singing sweetly, O cuckoo,  
 but (in the absence of Kanha)  
 it has a jarring effect on me.  
 O friends!

As I look into the mirror,  
 I do not find my image:  
 such is the spell cast on me  
 by father Vitthala—the husband of Rakhmadevi



*ii*

The crow caws in the distance,  
tells of a god omen,  
Fly away, O crow, I will coat your feet with gold,  
if Pandharirao (Vitthal), the guest,  
comes to my home.

I will feed you  
a lump of rice and curd;  
convey to Pandharirao urgently  
my intense affection for him.

I will hold up to your lips  
a cupful of milk:  
tell me truly  
if Vithoo is coming.

Peck the juicy fruits  
on the branches of the mango tree  
and tell me right now  
of good omens.

Says Jnaneshwar:  
know this;  
these are the signs of good omen  
of the meeting with Pandharirao (Vitthal)

*iii*

The image seen with eyes  
gives immense happiness, O dear!  
God is this Vitthal,  
God is this Madhav.  
Because of greatly accumulated merit  
I have developed affection  
for Vitthala, the repository of all happiness,  
Vitthala the father—the Lord of Rakhamadevi

*iv*

The cool breeze from the mount Malaya  
cannot be filtered through cloth;

the fragrance of flowers  
cannot be woven.

Know that God  
is all-pervading like this;  
he cannot be described as big or small.  
Nobody knows his exact form.

The lustre of pearls cannot be stored in an earthen pot;  
the sky cannot be put into a cloth-bag.  
camphor cannot be pounded to yield its inside grain;  
the sweetness of sugar cannot be separated by threshing.

The pupil cannot be separated from the eye,  
you cannot hold a friend's shadow in place of a friend;  
when Vitthal and Rakhamai quarrel,  
who can reconcile them?

v

This slip of a sapling  
planted at the door  
zooms up  
into the sky.

The *jasmine* blooms,  
the *jasmine* blooms profusely;  
when you pick flowers,  
it grows heavy with buds.

An apparel is woven  
with threads of mind  
and is offered to Vitthala  
the father—Lord of Rakhamadevi

*Abhangas*, 13th century

Tr. by Chandrashekhar Jahagirdar

### Sawata's Profession and Vitthal

SAWATA MALI

The following is a devotional poem with a difference by Sawata Mali (13th century).

Onion, radish, vegetables  
is all my Mother-Vitthal.  
Garlic, chilli, coriander  
have become my entire Hari.

Leathern bucket, draw-rope, well, and cord  
have occupied the whole of Pandhari.

Sawata says—I've cultivated a vegetable-garden,  
At the feet of Vitthal my throat did I fasten.

*Kanda, Mula, Bhaji*, 13th century

Tr. by Pradeep Gopal Deshpande

### Heart-renderings of Rukmini for the Attainment of Krishna

#### MAHADAMBA

MAHADAMBA (Mahadambā (1228-1303) was the first woman poet in Marathi. Her original name was Rupai. She is widely known for her *dhavalas* or marriage poems in her *Rukmini Swayamvar* (Rukmini Svayamvar), a poetic account of the marriage of Krishna and Rukmini.

Six of these marriage songs are given below.

#### 1

Rukmini inquired of her companions about the talk amongst the inmates of the palace and about the views of her parents and her brother Rukmi (regarding her marriage). She was told that according to their talk She was to accept Shishupala in marriage.

#### 2

On hearing that Shishupala was to be her bridegroom, the maiden got disturbed and was overcome with agony. Consequently, she remembered to herself Lord Krishna, saying, "O God! I am in pressing distress. And listen! None but you is my saviour now."

3

Taking it to heart she became very anxious and prayed:  
 "Cut off this bond and protect me, O God! Have grace  
 upon the afflicted and come to my deliverance. Save  
 me from the prison-house of Shishupala and show me your  
 holy feet!"

4

She then sent her companion and summoned Sudeva who on  
 seeing her asked, "Why is your face morose? Why are  
 you in mental anguish, O daughter of Bhimaka?" Rukmini  
 replied, "O Sir, I have been neglected by Krishna.

5

"Having been born in the lunar dynasty, and having always  
 meditated upon the feet of Lord Krishna, how can I have  
 any other way now? My father has, however, fixed up  
 Shishupala as my bridegroom. Now if I do not attain  
 Lord Krishna, my entire life would only be a burden to the earth!

6

Speed on, therefore, go to Lord Krishna, and convey my  
 entreaty to him. Tell him, "I am a suppliant to  
 you for my protection. So come here and take me away.  
 O Govinda, if you think yourself to be a protector of  
 your devotee. Else, leave all claims to any such forte!"

*Dhavale, 13th-14th century*

*Tr. by S.G. Tulpule*

## Rukmini in Separation

NARENDRA

The following excerpt is from *Rukminiswayamvara Kavya* (Rukmiṇisvayamvara Kāvya: stanzas 467-507) by NARENDRA (13th-14th century), a scholar poet, whose work shows his erudition and mastery of the ornamental style.

### Setting of the Sun

Then says the Uchitachandrika—  
 The sun is approaching the western horizon  
 offering its rich radiance  
 to the house of corals.

As though a bird with passionate love  
 is rushing into the red forest of *kumkum*  
 Or, scorched by the fire of Lord Shiva's third eye,  
 the love-god is plunging into the western sea. . . .

Or, a round earthen vessel full of light  
 Or, an eagle camping on the *patal*  
 Or, as though Lord Krishna has laid on the western rim  
 lotus-lustre—

Or, as though at dusk time  
 the golden *saras* in search of his mate  
 enters the lake of *darkness*  
 So does the sun enter the western horizon.

### Darkness at Dusk-time

Or, as though there bursts open a load of sapphires  
 darkness spreads over the mountain top  
 or like a mountain of emerald  
 toppled by the eagle's voice.

As though mighty clouds of musk are thickening  
 Or, the swan of the sky has scattered its young ones everywhere  
 Or the globe of Brahma is full of  
 the dark water of the Ganga.

As though, the sky looks like an exuberant foliage of *tamal* trees  
 Or, the sky is enveloped in the surge of the smoke of strong temptation  
 Or, to the meadow between earth and heaven comes grazing  
 the colossal herd of iron-black cattle.

Or, the Spring flings suddenly  
 a cover of blackness, from the lotus army  
 to the woman.  
 suffering from separation.

Or, in the temple of the globe  
the goddess and god of love worship Kali, the sky and  
the blue lotuses offered in homage  
are seen in the sky all over.

### Dusk-time Happenings

Lotuses are closing their petals;  
Birds are nearing their nests;  
Chakravaks pine in agony;  
because of separation from the beloved.

With the fragrance of various flowers,  
the royal highway is suffused;  
there swarm in the market of flowers  
throng of lovers.

The Brahmins have finished their holy evening-rituals and  
the sixteen-faceted worship of God.  
the Agnihotra Brahmins, having completed their rites of worship  
to the perpetual sacred-fire,  
have broken their observance of silence.

The City Council is filled up  
with the sacred notes of horns;  
the musician-dancers' *nandi*  
fill the sky...

Attractively made up prostitutes  
earn wealth from the lewd;  
the adulteresses are being led by the female go-betweens  
to the rendezvous...

How infatuating is the woman of night  
who blinds the light!  
That is why lamps guarded by cups of palms  
are carried from home to home.

### Illumination of Lamps

In the town, lamps are burning in front of the tutelar deities;  
Millions of lamps stretch out in continuous rows,  
As though the treasure-trove of Lord Krishna's valour  
is marching...

As though, before setting, thousands of rays of the sun  
 have perforated the impudent darkness with arrows,  
 Or to keep watch over the haughty darkness,  
*the sun has set watch-posts with hundreds of guards . . . .*  
 Or the mighty darkness has vehemently impeded  
 the sun's vanguards on the front,  
 Or from the ocean of darkness have surfaced  
 the new-born rubies...

As though the evening has conquered the night  
 and has offered it its bright colours,  
 or with the invasion of darkness  
 lightning has aborted its embryos on the earth.

### Blossoms of Stars

Stars appear in the sky  
 like flower-buds blooming in the sky  
 or the clouds busy in variegated embroidery  
 studded with pearls...

Or the chakora birds flutter their wings and spatter around  
 the milky drops of the Mandakani—the celestial Ganga... So are the stars!  
 Or they look like *Shivalings*  
 in the Narmada of the sky.

Thereupon says Bharati, the maid confidante of Rukmini—  
 There blossoms the moon ... and when poet Narendra describes this scene,  
 the eighth sea of the *Rasa*—  
 will surge up with the high-tide.

### The Moonlight and the Moon

On the second night of the new moon,  
 the corn of moonlight shoots out;  
 On the fifth night of the new moon,  
 the corn will burst into flowers...

Similarly, on the eighth night of the new moon,  
 the milky sap fills in the corn of moonlight;  
 on the tenth night of the new moon, the corn is nearly mature,<sup>4</sup>  
 And, on the thirteenth night, the chakoras give up their fast

and feed on the moonlight ...  
 On the top of the horizon,  
 the full moon with its retinue spreads out.  
 On the thrashing-floor of the sky  
 there are heaps of corn for the chakoras.

As though risen from the churning ocean of moonlight is  
 the moon, like the beautiful face of Goddess Lakshmi;  
 the moon is the tribute of nectar  
 Indra has presented to Lord Krishna.

Moonlight is a creeper sprawling across the canopy of the sky  
 on which bloom the flowers of the stars  
 and the nectar-seeds have sprouted  
 into the form of the moon.

Or in the sheen of the sky  
 is reflected the Kailas;  
 Or the white tent of Lord Krishna  
 adorned with a white fabric.

The love-god, the master himself,  
 has strewn in the palaestra of the sky  
 the white crystals  
 of pure camphor, as though for practice.

Or the female swan of Lord Krishna's glory  
 sought union with the swan of Brahma,  
 And, has laid an egg in the sky...  
 in the form of the moon.

Or, to water the crop around villages  
 with the immeasurable milk of the ocean of milk  
 The moon is a measure  
 used in heavenly transactions.

Or with the paste of divine quicksilver held in hand,  
 to conquer Lord Shiva.  
 on the battlefield of the sky stands the lonely love-god,  
 whose weapons are floral.

The sky is replete with nectar. This moonlight  
 is the divine elixir of the life of love,



Or this moon is the goddess of creation,  
 who brought into being the moonlight and the stars.  
 Or the moon is the white island,  
 and the dark spot on the moon is Lord Krishna himself,  
 who, standing, beholds  
 the figure of Chakradhar

Or in the entire palace of the globe of earth  
 the moon is the mirror made of distilled nectar;  
 reflected in it is the image of Lord Krishna  
 —it is not the black spot!

Or, beseeching God to fulfil their craving for a husband like Lord Krishna,  
 gathered on the bank of the Ganga of the sky, the beautiful dancers of  
 heaven, making a *Shivalinga* of the star-sands  
 and placing upon it the blue lotus-flowers...

### Functions of the Phases of the Moon

Or the goddess of fragrance is sitting majestically  
 upon the bed of the nightly blown buds of white lilies,  
 and the bare arms of moonbeams worship her  
 with the blackbees....

None other is the knower of arts like the moon  
 who pierces millions of white lotuses and sets them abloom,  
 who makes Chandrakant—  
 ooze water....

No one knows the wine of the moonlight.  
 It excites even the inanimate sea, which,  
 seizing on the excuse of the high-tide.  
 embraces the earth.

The keys of moonbeams  
 unlock the houses of shells  
 and, together with clouds,  
 deposit therein the treasure of pearls.

From the water-pot of the moon,  
 the chakoras have drunk the wine of moonlight  
 with their holy mouths  
 and are swaying at night.

The moon, who so selflessly gave away  
the feed of its phases to this world,  
is held in all humility and gratitude  
by Lord Shiva, on his head....

From *Rukminiswayamvara Kavya*, 13th-14th century      Tr. by Pradeep Gopal  
Deshpande

## Three Memoirs

### NARENDRA AND PARASHURAM

The following are three memoirs from *Smritisthala* (Smṛtishala) ascribed to Narendra and Parashuram (13th-14th century).

### The History of the Composition of Rukmini-swayamvara

Poet Narendra, poet Sala and poet Nrisimha were three brothers. Of these, poet Nrisimha composed *Nalopakhyaṇa* (or the story of Nala), and poet Sala had composed *Ramayana*. They recited their poems before King Ramadeva Yadava. Poet Narendra was sitting there. He was already initiated by Bhatobasa. After hearing the recitations, he said to his brothers, "If you describe the temple of Dwaraka in a similar fashion, you would be freed of your sins!" In these words he rebuked them in the presence of the king. On this, they said to him, "Why do you not compose some poetry? Let us see your skill!" Seeing his honour at stake, Narendrabasa immediately set himself to work and composed eighteen hundred verses of *Rukminiswayamvara* and recited them before the king in the presence of his brothers. While reciting, he came to the following *ovi* or verse, meaning:

The seven seas could not stand the heat of the  
valour of Krishna and, being afraid,  
accepted retreat and gave Dwaraka to Him as a tribute.

On this the king said, "Assign the authorship of this literary work to me, and I will give you, as a gift, as many gold coins and *asus*<sup>1</sup> as the number of verses it contains." Narendrabasa, however, replied, "No, my lord! It will make the race of poets liable to reproof." At this his brothers felt mortified and the king was greatly surprised. The poet Narendra then came to Bhatobasa with his *Rukminiswayamvara* and was straight conducted into the fold of his cult (i.e. the Mahanubhava cult). Since then, the poem *Rukminiswayamvara* has come to be recognized as a sectarian one.

1. Gold Coins of the Yadava period.

## ii

## The Composition of Lilacharitra

Roaming, Mhaimbhat went to the village of Kheibhat and met him there with the intention of collecting some memoirs of the Master (i.e., Chakradhar) from him. Kheibhat was then going to his field and Mhaimbhat also went with him. As Kheibhat was ploughing the field,

Mhaimbhat was following him throughout asking all the while for more memoirs of the Master which he was narrating. Mhaimbhat would receive them with obeisance, then collect alms and dine, accepting nothing whatsoever from Kheibhat. One day he said to Kheibhat, "You possess the bread bearing the blessing of our Master. Please give me its washing for drinking." On this Kheibhat said, "I will give it provided you accept something from me." When Mhaimbhat said, "Well, I will," he brought forth the bread and gave him its washing. Mhaimbhat then partook of something from him and leaving the place came to Bhatobasa.

He then told everything before Bhatobasa and narrated to him the memoirs of the Master that he had secured. Bhatobasa said, "Yes" to facts and rejected those which were not facts, saying, "These are the words from the mouth of the Master, and not these." Then he said to Mhaimbhat, "The memoirs pertaining to Upadhya should be got verified from those particular persons. Mhaimbhat did accordingly and renarrated the memoirs before Bhatobasa. He then divided them into two parts, the former, i.e. *Purvardha*, and the latter, i.e. *Uttarardha*.

## III

Bhatobasa Prays to His Followers to  
Accept His Old-age Pension

Once there was a drought. The disciples could not receive any alms. They would go begging and collect only a few pieces of dry bread. But thinking that Bhatobasa would make up for the scanty alms by cooking for them, they would put cotton rags at the bottom of the begging bag and place the begged food on these. Then Bhatobasa would sanctify their beggings after which they would go to the river and eat there. One day Bhatobasa thrust his hand right upto the bottom of someone's begging bag, when he found the food very light in weight. "What is this? Why is the bag light?" he asked and searched for the food. When he saw cotton rags at the bottom, he just kept quiet. He could see that there was a drought. In the evening he went to their dormitory, stood before them with folded hands

and prayed to them, "All of you are at the helm of Chakradhar's cult. So you should give me what I ask for. Saying so, he prostrated before them at which they were stunned and rose up. They said, "Oh, get up, get up, Bhato. We will give you whatever you want." Then Bhatobasa said, "I have received my old-age pension. Please use it and accept a begging from me from to-day." They agreed. Then Bhatobasa would cook some food and his followers would accept it as his *bhiksha* or alms, one piece of bread, dal curry, rice and leaf vegetable. Then they would go to the river and eat. In this way Bhatobasa's earnings were used by his sect. When there was plenty, the disciples stopped accepting food from him.

From *Smritisthala*, 13th-14th century

Tr. by S.G. Tulpule

## Open the Wattle-door O Jnaneshwar !

### MUKTABAI

MUKTABAI (13th century) was one of the four children of Vitthalpant and Rukmini Kulkarni, all of whom took to the path of devotion. Nivrutti, Jnanadeva and Sopanadeva were her brothers.

Show mercy to me:  
Open the wattle-door, O Jnaneshwar!

A Yogi of pure mind is one  
who suffers the offence of the people.

When the world turns into conflagration out of anger  
the speech of the saints should flow like water.

When the weapons of words cause torment  
suffer it by accepting the advice of saints.

If the universe is cloth, then through its entirety runs  
the single thread of the Brahma! Open the wattle-door, Jnaneshwar!

One becomes a saint only by suffering the abuses of the world:  
he who is devoid of conceit attains greatness.

Where greatness dwells,  
there dwells compassion.

Who can you be angry with,  
when we are the all-pervading Brahma?

See all with equal regard,  
open the wattle-door, O Jnaneshwar!

*Tati Ughada, Jnaneshwar, 13th-14th century*

*Tr. by Pradeep Gopal  
Deshpande*

## Selections

### NAMDEV

A contemporary of Jnaneshwar, NAMDEV (Nāmdēv, 1220-1350) was, right from his childhood, a passionate devotee of Vitthal. Namdev was born in the *Shimpi* or tailor caste and his father's name was Dama Sheti. Though they give great importance to *bhakti*, his writings reveal his excellent understanding of philosophy. Along with Jnaneshwar, he undertook a pilgrimage to the North and wrote about this journey in his *Teerthavali*. Namdev's *Adi Teerthavali va Samadhi* record Jnaneshwar's life as well as his own life in the autobiographical mode. Namdev initiated the *kirtan* tradition to spread the Warkari or the bhakti cult. He travelled widely in Gujarat, Punjab and the northern part to propagate the Maharashtrian bhakti cult. For this purpose, he composed verses in Hindi and Gurumukhi Punjabi. About 100 verses written by Namdev are incorporated in *The Granthsahib* under the title *Namdev ki Mukhbani*.

Many scholars have given to Namdev the credit of propagating the Warkari sect in and even outside Maharashtra.

Namdev's *abhangas* are very large in number. A major theme running through them is Namdev's intense devotion to Vitthal and his ardent desire to meet him. His *abhangas* thus constitute a kind of emotionally portrayed spiritual life.

### 1

#### Returning from the Pilgrimage

#### Abhangas

### i

Waiting, my eyes have grown weary;  
My heart is choked up with yearning.

You are my Mother, my most intimate companion;  
O Vitthal! rush to me, and embrace me.

You are my mother-bird, and I—your egg-born;  
I am afflicted with hunger, you have forgotten me...

You are my doe, and I—your fawn;  
Release me from the tangle of the snares of this world.

You are my mother, and I—your suckling;  
Feed me affectionately the milk of you love.

Nama says, God, quench my yearning—  
Give your suckling the feed of your love. . .

II

How little do I ask!  
The Giver is the husband of Lakshmi though.  
Where clouds shower a pelting downpour.  
A chatak needs only a beakful.

From the great depth of the Ganga water,  
One is content with only a gowpen<sup>1</sup>.

From a hoard of sugar,  
An ant needs only its mouthful.

Nama says, I am your servant,  
Whereas you are a great store of Munificence.

III

I had heard that you are the Restorer of the fallen, so I came to your door;  
Realizing that you are not the Restorer of the fallen, I go back now. . . .

You give only when you receive, such is your generosity;  
Why should I then hang around your door, the miser that you are?

You are not what you are renowned to be, so give up your claim;  
Who has named you "The Restorer of the fallen",

Beating the gong, I shall proclaim to all the three worlds;  
that though known as "The Restorer of the Fallen",  
you are very treacherous.

Nama says, God, I expect nothing from you;  
I touch your feet so that there should be love for me in your heart. . . .

1. The cavity formed by putting the hands side by side.

*iv*

Rain-clouds have crowded in the sky;  
 Lightning has cracked thunderously;  
 O Mother. . .

How these clouds are pouring down honey,  
 In great haste, to see Govind;  
 O Mother. . . my Mother. . .

Thrilled with ecstasy, peacocks are dancing instinctively;  
 Their throats have turned blue, out of their love for God. . .  
 My Mother...

The Lord of Namaya looks sweet and gentle,  
 My soul has grown attached to Gopal;  
 O Mother. . .

*Abhangas*, 13th-14th century

Tr. by Pradeep Gopal Deshpande

2

### Abhangas on Jnanadev's Samadhi

*i*

Jnanadev has realized the inner and the outer knowledge;  
 He is himself the self-lit, ever-burning lamp.

Free from the concepts "coming" and "leaving",  
 Jnanadev, who has no "beyond" and "end", is an ever-living Yogi  
 who has entered Vaikuntha, a small place.

Ignorant are those who consider the samadhi of such a great  
 knower to be "death";  
 Therefore do not feel sad unnecessarily.

The vessel, filled with water, reflects the sky;  
 Does it mean that the sky does not exist without the vessel?

The mirror causes a reflected face;  
 Does it mean that there are two faces?

Here, "being" can be seen because of "seeing";  
Does this distort the supreme meaning that the divine emanation  
and the body are not two different things but one only?

True that the cloth has its expanse because of the Yarn. . . .  
Does it mean that the Infinite exists in vain?

God Vitthal, thus, consoled them,  
And they all became silent....

2

Nivriddhi and Jnanadev stand apart;  
In front of Muktbai, stands Sopan.

The entire assembly of gods liesurely stands to watch, leaving all dazed;  
The great heavenly music in Paradise has begun to extol. . .

God and the great sages stand at the Chakrateerth,  
And give holy bath to Jnanadev. . . .

Now, Jnaneshwar receives from Vitthal the sacred water,  
And humbly touches the lotus-shaped feet.

Jnanadev, now, performs the worship of God Vitthal,  
Rukmini, and all the gods and sages.

Namdev holds in his hands the *gandha*<sup>1</sup> and the consecrated  
ricegrains for Jnanadev;  
So perfect a homage is this that all the great priests have approved of it.

*iii*

Amidst the great, ceaseless symphony of cymbals, lutes and tabors,  
Narad, the celestial singer, and Tumbar, the celestial musician, are singing.

Shuka, Vamadev and Ambarishi stand around in reverence,  
And, in the midst stands Jnaneshwar,  
One with the knowledge of the Brahma. . . .

Such a great crowd of the Vaishnavas surges forward,  
That even an ant cannot find its way through them. . . .

1. Red powder mixed with water/sandalwood paste applied on the forehead.



God, says Namdev, you have shown the Novelty to all,  
And have quenched the cravings of Jnanoba. . . .

*iv*

On the tenth lunar day, the holy circumambulation was performed;  
And the saints stood up for hymn singing, and dancing. . .

Day and night, they were lost in the invocation of the name of God Hari,  
On the sacred eleventh lunar day of the fortnight of the waning moon.

Jnanadev, then, bathed on the pious banks of the Bhagirathi,  
and worshipped the great saints and sages with devotion.

He, then, beheld the inner and the outer world,  
and arrived at Siddheshwar.

He, then, rendered the purest homage to Siddheshwar,  
and asked for the place of the Samadhi.

Jnanadev, then, joined his palms in obeisance  
to Ganga, Girija and Lord Shiva, says Nama.

*Shri Jnanadevanchi Samadhi*, 13th-14th century

*Tr.* by Pradeep Gopal  
Deshpande

3

**Abhang 923: Returning from the Pilgrimage**

Returning from the pilgrimage to the sacred places, Nama came to Pandhari,  
And met the beloved Vithoba.

His throat choked with emotion and eyes filled with profuse tears,  
He rolled over the feet of Vitthala.

O Lord of Pandhari, fatigued as I am , view me with grace;  
Without you, I have been greatly dejected.

As I was ignorant in some respect,  
You made me rove far and wide.

But to be in Pandhari is to be happy to the utmost extent;  
Such happiness can never be seen even in dreams.

One hears about the grandeur of many sacred places,  
But my heart is drawn to the Chandrabhaga.

That is why I stand in the shadow of your feet;  
Look after me, now that I have come back to you

O my Mother, my Father. . . .

My eyes do not see gods at those sacred places,  
Nor do my palms join in obeisance to them.

My feet refuse to traverse the paths leading to them,  
Nor do my ears hear their fame.

The god who has not placed his hands on his loins,  
The god whose feet cannot be seen standing on the brick—

To call him “God” fills my mind with shame;  
Who shall I tell about this miserable state of mind.

In the town where there is no congregation of the Vaishnavas,  
The abundance of Harikatha is never experienced.

The god who does not bear any sign of the Garuda vehicle,  
I greatly doubt him,.

Whenever I can't see these signs, I feel dejected,  
At such moments, I recollect you entire person—

You are my beloved friend, my loving brother, my family deity—  
says Nama, Vithoba, you are my dear soul. . .

4

#### Abhang 924: Keshav Says Namya . . .

Keshav says, Namya, I am greatly unhappy;  
Waiting for you I have not been able to sleep.

This Pandhari appears deserted without you;  
Not even for a moment are you forgotten.

You are inseparable from my eyes,  
For, away from me though, you have set your heart on me.

You are attached to me, and I am fond of you;  
Just as sweetness never leaves jaggery—

So are we into each other;  
Think of it, in fact, we are not two.

To every passer-by, I ask after you;  
I ask him if he chanced to see Nama.

I felt concerned about Nama's hunger and thirst while he was on pilgrimage,  
Who else knows Nama's mind if not me?

Night and day, pining for me,  
He must have chanted my name.

Without me, whose shadow will he rest in?  
Who will inquire about his fatigue and discomfort?

He has been telling saints that his weary without me,  
And that he has held on to his life just for me.

Having said this fondly holding his chin, God Vitthal, then embraced Namdev;  
Caressing his face, he wiped his tears away. . . .

Then taking off the wreath of tulasi-flowers from his neck,  
He put it around Namdev's neck.

The All-Beautiful God Vitthal looks at him affectionately;  
He, the Ocean of Mercy, talks about the innermost things of the heart.

Nivritti, Jnanadev, Sopan, Khechar,  
Narahari the goldsmith, and all others—

All the devotees together, come rolling over and over,  
and hold Namdev in embrace. . . .

All gods profusely shower flowers;  
The words of the holy acclamation pervade the sky. . . .

The great sages and the gandharvas together:  
All come to experience the happiness of this sight.

Rukmai rushed out with the *arati* in her hands,  
And waved it around the god and the devotee.

Fondly, she held Namdev's chin,  
and cast glances of grace every now and then. . . .

5

Abhang 1474: The Whole of this Life

The whole of this life I will sublimate into happiness;  
Although it has become formidable with sorrow.

The name of Vithoba shall I sing fervently;  
For, his name fills my heart with happiness.

The cravings of my senses are fully satiated;  
All the passions of my heart subside... ,

My ears hear only the verses of your name;  
I do not hear praise and censure of the sinful.

Seeing your pure face adorned with ear-rings,  
My eyes cool down...

I will hold your feet along with the brick  
So that my body will be contented.

In the company of saints, I shall dance round and round--  
So that my three-fold torture will vanish.

Nama says, you are the kinsman of entire happiness;  
I will never forget you, O munificent God, even for a moment.

6

Abhang 1552: Let this Body Perish or Remain

Let this body perish or remain;  
My faith shall remain unwavering in Panduranga.

I shall never budge from your feet,  
I swear by you, O Lord of Pandhari.

Your holy name on my lips,  
And our interminable, constant love shall remain for ever. . . .

As is my lot,  
So shall we meet;

Nama says, Keshavaraja,  
Sustain my vow.

*Abhanga*, 13th-14th century

*Tr.* by Pradeep Gopal Deshpande

## Rush to me, Vitthoo

### CHOKHA MELA

CHOKHA MELA (Cokha Mela, 13th-14th century), born in a poor outcaste family in Mangal vedhe near Pandharpur, was drawn to Namdeva. He is the author of about 350 devotional *abhangas*.

Rush to me Vitthoo! Now do not walk slow:  
I have not given any offence such that the Badves should beat me.

How has Lord Vitthoba's necklace come round your throat? — they ask;  
They abuse me, they call me *mahar* and say—you have defiled God.

O God! Great Lord! a dog at your door that I am;  
Do not abandon and disown me, Lord Chakrapani, you are responsible too.

Joining hands in obeisance Chokha beseeches God;  
For whatever I have spoken, do not get angry.

*Dhava Ghali Vitthu*, 13th-14th century

*Tr.* by Pradeep Gopal Deshpande

## Three Poems

### JANABAI

JANABAI (13th-14th century), born in a Shudra family in Ganga Kheda, was the daughter of Dama and Karunda. She became a follower of Namdev. She has written more than 350 *abhangas*. A few other works are also attributed to her.

/

Already, the *pallu* has descended from the head to my shoulders;  
Unabashed, I shall go now to the crowded bazaar.

I shall take cymbals in hands and a *veena* on the shoulder.  
Who is going to forbid me, now?

In the market place of Pandhari, I have openly set up my trade;  
You can put oil on the wrist and bawl and bellow and curse me.

Jani says—God, I have become a prostitute;  
I am out to gatecrash into your house, O Keshava!

## 2

Come, come soon Vithabai,  
My mother of Pandhari!

Then Bhima and the Chandrabhaga,  
Both are the Ganga emerging from your feet.

Do come accompanied by all these,  
and dance in my arena.

My colour is in your characteristics;  
purely out of your virtue—says Namaya's Jani.

## 3

My Vithu is a family-man;  
With him is a group of young ones.

Nivritti is on his shoulder;  
he holds the hand of Sopan.

Walking ahead is Jnaneshwar,  
The beautiful Muktabai following him.

Gora Kumbhar is in his lap,  
Chokha and Jiva are with him

Banka is in his arms,  
Nama holding the little finger,

Says Jani—God Gopal  
celebrate the festivity of the devotees.

## Two Stories

ANONYMOUS

Two stories from *Panchopakhyān* are given below.

## 1

The Deer Rescued by the Crow, the  
Mouse and the Tortoise

Chitrangad Deer seeks close friendship of the mouse, the tortoise and the crow, and desire to be friendly with them thinking that there would be no fear of anything if they become his friends. When asked by them, why he desired their friendship even though he was stronger, the Deer narrates this story.

"Once in a burrow there lived many rats. An elephant used to pass by it to drink water. So he made friends with rats. The elephant used to feed the rats whatever was left out of his feed. In this way the rats were nourished. Thus they became friends. Once while going to drink water, the elephant fell into a pit. Then he remembered the rats. One rat came there and cut off the net-strings. Thus he helped the elephant to come out of the pit."

Mantharka, the tortoise, found this story convincing. Then all four of them became friends. In the afternoon, the four would sit together and chat. One day, however, the deer did not turn up. The crow, being the youngest, was sent to look for the deer. The deer at that time was trapped in a net. Seeing this, the crow came back and told them, "O friends, the deer is trapped in a net. Let us therefore go there and save him." Mantharka then said to the crow and the rat, "Go there and cut off his net-strings. I will come later on." Hearing this, both set out and cut off the deer's net-strings. Mantharka then came after them. Then the crow and the rat and the deer said, "Mantharka, why have you come? If the hunter comes, how are we going to save you?" As they were saying this, they saw a hunter coming. The crow flew away and sat atop a tree. The deer leaped away. The rat ran into a hole. The hunter caught the tortoise, bound his feet and tied him to a wooden staff. He put the staff on his shoulder and started. Then the three friends became greatly sad. They thought to themselves, "What is to be done now?" Hiranyaka then remembered a wise saying:

"One who protects from sorrow, protects from fear and is the highest abode of affection: this is what a friend is." Who created this two-lettered jewel? The Hiranyaka, the mouse, said to Chitrangada, the deer, "Go ahead

and lie still on the bank of the river. And you O crow, sit on the deer and peck at him and just make cawing sounds." He did likewise. Then the rat followed him quietly. The hunter then reached the river. He looked around and saw the deer lying still. He put the tortoise on his shoulder down on the driver-bank. He ran towards the deer. Then the rat cut off the net-strings around the tortoise. The tortoise entered into the water. The rat went into a hole.

The hunter went near the deer. The crow then flew away and sat atop a tree. The deer leaped up and ran ahead. The hunter looked back and the tortoise was not there. Surprised, he went home. Then the four friends came together, and lived happily in their respective places. Hence, we should get friends like these.

From *Panchopakhyān*, 14th-18th century

Tr. by Chandrashekhara  
Jahagirdar

2

Wife-enslaved King and the Minister

Once in a certain city the king's wife and the prime minister's consort were sisters. Once the younger sister asked the elder, "How much are you liked by your husband?" The elder sister said, "The king likes me very much. I'll give you proof for it today. Sit quietly in a corner of my room and watch the event." The queen then lay down. The council meeting concluded, the king came to the queen's palace. He saw her dejected. The king said, "Why are you sad? What's on your mind? Tell me, I'll do whatever you want." The queen said, "I'm embarrassed to say it." The king said, "Why should you? Speak freely." The queen said : "You had been to the war. I was deeply worried. I then made a vow to Jagmata: If my lord comes back safe and happy, I'll make him play the horse, ride him and make him neigh. This is the vow." Then the king said, "Why not? So be it. But fulfil this vow in a private place." Thus the king became a horse. On his back a saddle, round his mouth a metal ring was put. Then the queen rode his back and made him neigh. The younger sister watched the event. Soon the king left.

The younger sister then said to the elder one, "I'm much liked by the prime minister. Without me, he wouldn't do a thing. Therefore come to my house and witness the love my husband has for me." So one day the elder sister visited the younger one and took herself to a corner. Covering herself with a sheet, the prime minister's wife lay down on the bed. Soon the prime minister arrived home. He saw her asleep and cast down. He said, "Why are you dejected? Did any one hurt you? Tell me," She replied, "I am in a



difficult situation." He said, "Speak out. I'll act accordingly." She said, "When you had been to the war along with the king, you were away for many days. I was anxious for you. So I made a vow to Kalika: if the lord of my soul returns safe and happy, I'll offer the plait of his hair to the deity." He heard his wife. Then he thought for a moment and said, "Dear, fulfil this vow." The prime minister then called the barber. Got his head shaved. The elder sister witnessed the event and went home.

The next day the prime minister went to the king's court. The king saw something unusual. He asked, "O prime minister mine, why this unusual tonsure? Had you been on a pilgrimage?" The prime minister kept quite. He couldn't give an answer. Daily the king would ask him like this. Anxiety made the minister grow thin. Then his wife asked him, "Why have you grown so thin?" He said. "Your vow has proved heavy upon me. Every now and then, the king asks about the tonsure. What reply should I give him?" His wife was, "When the king questions you next, you should speak thus: I have fulfilled my how the way you have fulfilled yours." When one day the prime minister went to the king's court, the king asked, "Why this unusual tonsure?" The prime minister said, "I have fulfilled my vow the way you have fulfilled yours". "Likewise, O crocodile! You're wife-enslaved, and a plaything in the hands of your wife."

Know the wife-enslaved thus: He comes home and finds out if the food has been cooked, putting his finger in the earthen stove (to feel whether it is hot or cool) and sits quietly in a corner or looks at his wife and giggles or turns his head in the direction of water that his wife pours down when he bathes or while eating throws the bread like a discus (chakra) on the plate. Truly he is called Chakravarti. Know that these six features characterize the wife-enslaved. Likewise you are wife-enslaved, a plaything in the hands of your wife. We are different."

The crocodile said, "O brother, let us go to my house. Your sister-in-law must be waiting for you." The monkey said "O vicious and wily one, You've revealed the secret of your heart by speaking the truth. Truth spoiled the planned act: as Yudhishtir spoiled the course of action by telling the truth to the potter."

From *Panchopakhyān*, 14th-18th century

Tr. by Ravindra Kimbahunne

## So is it done by God Gopal

SHEIKH MOHAMAD

The following abhanga by SHEIKH MOHAMAD (16th century) expresses devotion to Lord Krishna.

So has it been done by God Gopal,  
that nothing is sacred or profane any more.

Though the bush of *ketaki* is thorny;  
inside grows the *Kewada*.

The jack-fruit bears thorns on the body,  
but conceals within, the deposits of nectar.

The outer shell of coconut is hard,  
but it contains within life-giving water.

Though Sheikh Mohamad is a non-Hindu,  
God Govind pervades his heart.

*Aise Kele Ya Gopala*, c. 16th century

Tr. by Pradeep Gopal Deshpande

## Selections

### EKNATH

SAINT EKNATH (Eknāth, 1533-1599) lived in Paithan. One finds in his personality and in his prolific writings a fine combination of the best in the tradition with the Warkari sect. Through these writings and through forms like the *Kirtan*, *Puran* and *Pravachan*, Eknath performed the task of propagating the Warkari sect and preserving culture during the Islamic period.

Eknath's writings include *Chatuhshloki Bhagwat*, *Eknathi Bhagwat*, *Rakmini Swayamvar* and *Bhavarth Ramayan*: he handled forms like the *abhang*, the *gaulari* and the *bharud* which could easily reach the masses. Through them, he took the Warkari sect to the common people. Both as a narrator and a composer of songs, Eknath has created an impact on the common people. One sees in his writings a combination of practical affairs and spiritual thought.

### 1

#### How to Sketch Bhimaki, the Charmer of Krishna?

It's much too hard to describe  
Bhimaki's charms:

Her measureless beauty  
That captured Krishna's heart.

(1)

Not the Creator's labour  
 But Krishna's influence  
 Enhances her looks  
 Till she's Beauty itself come to life. (2)

Fed up with emptiness, the sky  
 was eager to meet Krishna, and came  
 Down to Bhimaki's head  
 Splendid and propless (3)

Her hair deep blue  
 Is the same blue as the sky;  
 her fair face below it  
 Shines like the moon. (4)

Feeling sympathy for the lean moon in the dark clouds  
 Bhimaki considers it her brother from previous birth;  
 And accommodates it  
 In her face. (5)

The unwaning full moon  
 Is risen in Bhimaki's spotless face,  
 Eager to realize there  
 Lord Krishna totally. (6)

The moon is full only once;  
 Otherwise it waxes and wanes;  
 In Bhimaki's face it's ever  
 Full and self-contented. (7)

Just as the moon shines forth  
 With stars all around,  
 So pearly *taanavadas*<sup>1</sup> glow  
 On either side of Bhimaki's face. (8)

She's so enchanted Krishna;  
 She has forgotten to claim her *bhovaris*<sup>2</sup>  
 Her due from Krishna's mother  
 Who held them back. (9)

1. Ornaments

2. Ornaments given by mother-in-law to daughter-in-law.

So while the *bhovaris* are held back,  
 The *taanavadas* shine and show off;  
 But the two ornaments meet  
 Somewhere on Bhimaki's ears (10)

Broad is Bhimaki's forehead,  
 Made fortunate by Krishna's fate;  
 And the dark sheen on her forehead  
 Is the paste of musk. (11)

The moon has dark lines on it;  
 Similar is the musk on Bhimaki's forehead;  
 Her dark eyebrows are drawn  
 Beautifully curved. (12)

To look at the ever-present Lord  
 She smooths the curve of her eyebrow;  
 She looks into Krishna's eyes,  
 And then, all knots come untied. (13)

Krishna has given her a lovey hue;  
 Her union with him is unbreakable.  
 A red round spot on her forehead,  
 A moon upon a moon. (14)

Like the rainbow in the sky  
 Is vermillion in the parting of her hair  
 And to charm the lord of cowerds  
 She worships *Mohini*, and prays. (15)

Or maybe it's the flow of *Sarasvati*  
 Come down to meet Krishna  
 As a human soul goes  
 To meet the divine. (16)

Bhimaki has put on  
 A net studded with pearls,  
 Like a bejewelled sky,  
 Multiplying her charms. (17)

Above the net shines, like a flag of Bhakti,  
 Studded with gems  
 Nudging men and gods to praise  
 Krishna with constancy and devotion. (18)

In Bhimaki's eyes,  
Fed up with everyday scenes,  
Seemliness gathers;  
They have their fill of Krishna. (19)

Her irises have darkened  
To see Krishna, dark as clouds.  
Her eyes have found rest  
To see him within, without. (20)

She applies collyrium  
To look at precious Krishna,  
The shining eye-lashes  
Of glance arrows. (21)

Bhimaki's glance has floored  
The love-god Madan  
Not to speak of lesser gods and men;  
Krishna alone can stand it. (22)

The face is more charming than other parts  
But for the wet nose;  
Not so for Bhimaki

Whose nose heightens her charms. (23)

Fond of Krishna's sweet fragrance;  
Her nose must have grown comely;  
Spring has come to stay  
In her nostrils. (24)

Her lips are red like some ripe fruit;  
But while fruits perish with time,  
The lips, coloured by Krishna,  
Forever remain fresh. (25)

Krishna alone knows  
The nectar of Bhimaki's lips,  
Pounces for a grab  
And will carry it off. (26)

## 2

## Three Songs

*i*

The little one of Yashoda dances  
 Decked in a mirror-spangled frock;  
 The milkmaids come and prate with him,  
 And touch his baby-God feet.  
 They clap and sing the glory  
 Of little Govind.  
 He dances, adorned with a waist-band,  
 A bracelet and tiger claws,  
 And anklet bells and pretty armlets,  
 And ear-rings glittering away.

Eka Janardan says, the milkmaids surrender themselves  
 To the ultimate principle, even as they ward off the evil eyes.

*ii*

Now shall I go to Vrindavana.  
*Kanha* is playing the flute,  
 Hari is playing the flute,  
 And the river is full,  
 Clad in a pitambar, musk on the forehead;  
 Ear-rings adorn his ears.  
 What shall I do? Whom shall I ask?  
 Give me a raft of the divine name,  
 The son of Nanda has a wondrous gift.  
 He reads the mind and heart.

Eka Janardan says, chant God's name;  
 For his greatness none can grasp.

*iii*

Her ear-rings dangle in the wind,  
 As Radha wends playing about with her eyes,  
 Under the thick shade of fruit trees.  
 She holds an orange broom in her hands  
 To see her thus the Lord forgets himself

And sits down to milk an ox!  
 Radha, too, is beside herself  
 And churns an empty pot!  
 See how each has charmed the other,  
 Having become one body and soul.  
 Similarly charming is also Janardan's Eka.

From *Sakal Sant Gatha*, 16th century

Tr. by Jayant Paranjape

3

### The Mendicant's Song

i

The following is a commentary by Eknath on the 23rd chapter of the Eleventh *Skandha* of the *Bhagavata Purana* (Preface and verses 1 to 76)

### Invocation

#### Obeisance to Shri Ganesha

1

Obeisance to Thee, O Sadguru, "(Thou who appearest in) the form of the Universe; Thou who art in and without the Universe in Thy essential form of Intelligence. Yet, though thus attributing to Thee that form, Thou art formless and without parts.

2

The variety in which the animate and inanimate appear is but the variations in Thy formlessness. *Jiva* [Individual atma] and *Shiva* [Universal atma] are but Thy *Maya*. Non-duality is Thy glory.

3

A statue, made of solid *ghi*, appears as a form, but from the point of view of the *ghi* itself, it is formless. So thou, who art without parts, and indestructible appearest in the form of the Universe.

4

The Universe, which appears in a definite form, is in reality Thy body. But though viewed as Thy body, Thou art, however, bodiless, and yet even bodilessness is not to be ascribed to Thee.

5

Thou art not what appears to be and yet Thou art what is not. Still there is no such thing with thee as becoming or not-becoming. Such art Thou, the Universal guru of this Universe.

6

The (idea of ) sound is one remote from Thee, and yet Thou art within and without sound. Thou art He who speaks in all animate and inanimate creation. Thou art the Speaker in the *Vedas* and *Shastras*.

7

Sweetness is obtained from the sugar-cane. The sugar-cane has sweetness within and without it, but there is no sugar-cane in the sweetness. In that same good sense Thou art related to the *Vedas*.

8

Thou alone art the speaker in the *Vedas* and it is in the *Vedas* that Thou art described. And yet in the final analysis Guru dear dwellest where words cannot describe.

9

Just as sound in the abstract is inaudible until something is struck; and as there is no musical instrument that can make this inaudible sound.

10

So Thou art the Speaker in the *Vedas*, and the inspirer of all *Shastras*; they cannot in truth describe Thee.



## 11

If then one should assert that Thou art indescribable, this discussion of Thy being indescribable or describable arises from Thy *Maya*. Thou art not to be known in that way.

## 12

Thou alone art the knower of the fact that Thou art unknowable. But in asserting the fact that Thou the knower, the idea of Thy unknowableness disappears.

## 13

Where there is lacking the idea of not knowing, how can there be the idea of knowing? If there exists no such idea as a wife, who would say "Look at her husband."

## 14

Thou art, therefore, neither a knower nor a not-knower. Thou art neither a Speaker nor a Non-speaker. Thou art not Many, nor One. Thy very incomprehensibleness is incomprehensible.

## 15

Thou art indescribable in words, formless, qualitless, and without self-consciousness. But in thus defining Thee, one is lost in a dilemma, for Thou hast the form of the Universe, and art the Soul of the Universe.

## 16

It is evident Thou art in the form of the Universe, and being so, whose duality can injure whom? There is no other (than Thyself). Then who is there to feel the intense antagonistic wrongs of another (than Thyself)?

## 17

Thus, O *Sadguru*, my Lord, at Thy feet Duality becomes Oneness, and in accordance with that oneness Thou art continuing in the *Sri Bhagavata* the story of Thyself.

Shuka Tells Parikshiti of Krishna's  
Relating the Bhikshugita to Uddhava

18

In the Shri Bhagavata, at the close of the 22nd chapter, Uddhava is declared to have asked (Krishna) regarding peace-of-mind (*Shanti*) and the means for ending Duality.

19

Uddhava had asked a very wide question, in receiving an answer to which his desire for the knowledge of Brahma was satisfied. The question was pleasing to Shuka, and in relating it he satisfied the wish of Parikshiti.

20

Hearing the question put by Uddhava. Shuka was deeply moved with feeling of joy, and exclaimed, "O Parikshiti, give close attention. Shripati (Krishna) is pleased with Uddhava.

21

The state of *Nirvan*, which comes from the knowledge-of-Brahma, is the special form of Peace-of-Mind (*Shanti*). It was regarding this special *Shanti* that Uddhava raised the question in love and Shripati (Krishna) was pleased with it.

22

In the four succeeding chapters Krishna is about to describe *Shanti* and *Nivritti*, so listen, O King Parikshiti, while I relate to you what Krishna is to say.

23

Listen, O Light-of-the-Pandava-family. O chief-of-the-Kaurava family. You have rightly the authority to possess this peace, because you are a seeker after peace-of-soul.

## 24

In order to acquire the knowledge-of-Brahma you have ceased even to drink water, what you might listen, therefore, listen O King, to what Hari (Krishna) is about to relate to *Shanti* and *Nivritti*."

## Contents of Chapters 23 to 26

## 25

In this 23rd chapter there is the description of one whose mind (*mana*) evil men attempted to ruffle, but to his *mana* there came full forgiveness. It is his story that Sri Krishna is about to relate in the 23rd chapter.

## 26

This Bhikshugita has for its special subject the control of the *Mana* (mind). The subject of the control of prakriti (one's individual self) will be fully developed in the 24th chapter.

## 27

After describing the three *gunas* (qualities) Krishna caused Uddhava's attention to His own *nirgun* (without qualities) state. In the 25th chapter the control of the *gunas* is clearly explained.

## 28

The 26th chapter contains the subject of absolute freedom from worldly desires. After this follows the Ailagita, which teaches the rejection of every object of sense, women and all else.

## 29

In these four chapters respectively, Krishna, with his own lips, clearly explains the control of the *mana* (mind), *prakriti* (one's individual self), objects of sense, and the *gunas* (the qualities).

### Shri Shuka Awakens King Parikshiti's Attention

30

It was in the following words that Shri Shuka, the great *yogi* made Parikshiti attentive, and put before him the contents of the story (of the miser).

31

Shuka said, "O Parikshiti, Shripati (Krishna) was pleased with the sentiments he heard Uddhava utter, and expressed himself thus to Uddhava.

32

"Only at the end of ten millions of years does one acquire Brahmanhood in a noble family. Such a birth is the natural fruit of supreme good deeds. But it is fruitless if it is without devotion (bhakti) to Hari.

33

There may exist a fruitful mango tree, but overgrown with a parasite. Though by nature it is a fruitful tree, you perceive that it becomes unfruitful. Such is the case with even good people who lack devotion to God.

34

Such is not the case with Uddhava. he has had noble birth in the Yadava family line. Even if he has reached the highest social position, he has not been seduced by prosperity.

35

O Maharaj! He who, though possessed with royal riches, does not neglect the worship (bhakti) of God, acquires of a certainty the chief place among God's worshippers.

36

He who will not neglect the path of God, even for a noble, beautiful, dutiful, and lovely wife, bears the name of being God's special *bhakta*.

37

Uddhava possesses these characteristics in a high degree. Through right-thinking (*viveka*) he has entirely lost his desire for worldly things, and chief among the worshippers of God, is attached to the feet of Shri Krishna.

38

The greatness that comes merely from age or wealth is, utter inferiority. True greatness is in acquiring God, and through the blessing that comes from it, Uddhava became perfect.

39

He was the trusted one of Shri Krishna. Shri Krishna used to take him privately aside, and give him the mystic knowledge. How can I sufficiently praise good fortune!

40

The Supreme-Brahma, manifested as Krishna, was at Uddhava's command, and because he followed His teachings, he was the one especially blessed in his good fortune."

41

As Shuka continued to relate the happy fortune of Uddhava, he was choked with emotion; he overflowed with joy, and became speechless through the superabundance of his happiness.

42

When the chief of the Kauravas (King Parikshiti) saw that in relating this extreme good fortune of Uddhava, Shri Shuka was overcome with emotion, he became intensely astonished.

43

In relating the happy fortune of Uddhava Shri Shuka was overcome with emotion, and I also acknowledge Uddhava's good fortune.

44

Shuka then said to the king (Parikshiti), "Because Uddhava was possessed with supreme good fortune, when he made his request to Hrishikeshi (Krishna), he was greatly pleased with his question.

45

Uddhava had a longing for peace of mind (*shanti*) and Uddhava's question regarding it was pleasing to Shri Krishna. To satisfy, therefore, Uddhava's desire, Krishna tells a story at length.

46

"You are certainly one with authority to acquire supreme peace of mind", said Krishna, and then making of his love for Uddhava an opportunity, Shri Hari (Krishna) explained that peace of mind (*shanti*).

#### Krishna and Uddhava Converse on Shanti (Peace-of-Mind)

47

"Uddhava, what you have asserted, I accept as true. No ordinary man possesses so peaceful an mind as to be able to bear the insults of evil men.

48

He to whose *padukas* (footprints) the gods bow with their heads; He at whose feet the great Indra falls; He to whom the great *Siddhis* (mystic powers) are slaves; He at whose bidding stands the knowledge-of-Brahma;

49

He, namely Brihaspati, the *guru* of the gods,—you are his disciple. You are right-thinking (*viveka*) in visible form. Therefore you certainly may learn the way to acquire that peace-of-mind.

## 50

But that Uddhava might grasp the full meaning of *shanti* (peace-of-mind), Hrishikeshi (Krishna) politely accepted his statement, and assented to his assertion, and then proceeded to describe what pure *shanti* is.

## 51

"When evil men insult, he who can endure their insults, contempt and scorn, is himself God, perfect in his enlightenment, one in form with me.

## 52

He who is deeply pervaded with the thought that he himself is in all creatures, such a one willingly bears the blows of evil men.

## 53

He who sees himself as the whole universe, though he be afflicted by many troubles, he has no rise of angry feelings within him. He willingly bears troubles without pain.

## 54

If one's own hand slaps one's own body no exclamation of anger or hatred is provoked. So he who sees himself as the animate and inanimate, *shanti* (peace of mind) enters his abode of her own accord.

## 55

Uddhava, He, who is thus enlightened, is called a true *sadhu* (saint). He bears the wrongs done to him by others. He is a true example of one possessing pure peace-of-mind.

## 56

Those wise men, whose knowledge does not include this knowledge of themselves, they cannot bear the sufferings that arise from Duality, Listen! I will explain.

57

The word-arrows of evil men cause deeper wounds than even do the sharpest of steel arrows, whose piercings cause one to writhe in agony.

58

Wherever a steel-tipped arrow pierces there is local pain, but the power of word-arrows is greater. It even wounds one's ancestors.

59

If one is wounded by the piercing of a steel-tipped arrow, the pain can be cured by a leaf-poultice, but if pierced by a word-arrow the sore remains for life.

60

When the word-arrows of insult, with their poison that reaches the very vitals, pierce one, they lacerate the heart, and the whole body is set aflame.

61

It is therefore certainly true that the ordinary man has not the *shanti* (peace of mind) necessary for bearing the evil words of men, and their impertinent insults."

62

Thus mindful of the thought of Uddhava, Shri Krishna begins the attempts to illustrate (by a story) the true meaning of *shanti* (peace of mind).

63

He said to Uddhava, "Hasten to acquire the peace-of-mind already described." He thought of the difficulties Uddhava would feel, and the disappointments he would meet.

64

For it was in Uddhava's thought that *shanti* was impossible for all men to



attain. Knowing this Hrishikeshi (Krishna) related the story called the Bhikshugita (Song of the Mendicant).

### The Bhikshugita (Song of the Mendicant) Praised

65

These supremely pure words of Krishna, a veritable Ganga, in the form of a historical tale, are for the purpose of immediately washing away the filth of the heart, consisting of passions and unrest.

66

This Peace-Godavari river has its birth beneath the Audumbar tree, namely the Shri Bhagavata, on Mount Brahma, namely the mouth of Shri Krishna. Thus from its very source it is pure.

67

Then passing by a subterranean passage, Narad-like, it suddenly appears, at Gangadvara in the form of Uddhava, through the words of Vyasa. Then again the same river, through the mouth of Shuka appears suddenly at Kushavarta in its purifying power.

68

The course of this holy stream eastward is formed from the union of the rivers Aruna, Varuna and Sarasvati, namely Faith, Courage and Bhakti.

69

Into the high overflowing flood of this Peace-Ganga-River those keen to listen take their plunge and become holy through their forgiving spirit.

70

Shri Krishna revealed this far-famed Peace-Ganga-River in relating the Mendicant's Song (Bhikshugita) for the purpose of making Uddhava holy.

71

"Uddhava", said Krishna, "a certain *sannyasi*, when being troubled by some

evil-minded persons, said to himself. "My evil deeds are being destroyed (through their persecution)." And thus this forgiving man became happy.

72

When one's filth is being washed away through others, he who lets anger disturb his heart, is a self-injuring fool.

73

Those whom people called "wicked" that *sannyasi* used to call "my own people", for, said he, "the extinction of my own evil deeds is taking place through their acts."

74

If any one, therefore, reviled him to his face, his heart used to greatly rejoice. He would exclaim, "Shripati (Krishna) is pleased with me. This will easily destroy the sin that is in me."

75

With such thoughts he kept his peace of mind from being at all shaken, and climbing to the very summit of his courage he sang the following song. Listen to it."

76

Shri Krishna said to Uddhava, "For this reason listen with attention. I will relate to you how an intensely avaricious man became one who entirely lost all worldly desires."

*ii*

The following is the Story of a Converted  
Miser of Avanti (Verses 77-175)

77

"In the country of Malava, in the city of Avanti, there lived in his home a Brahman. He earned his livelihood through agriculture and trade.

He possessed an abundance of wealth, grain, and limitless money. But he had a most miserly character. He never even ate sufficiently.

## 79

What he did eat was poor food, and even of that not a stomachful. Of course, therefore, his wife, children and servants did not have sufficiency for their stomachs.

## 80

He never performed the regular religious rites or those prescribed for occasions. Not even in his dreams did he ever do an act of charity. Gods, Brahmans and guests turned away hungry.

## 81

If he saw an opportunity for gaining a single *kavadi*, he would even neglect the *shraddha* ceremony for his maternal and paternal ancestors, and go even to the house of an outcaste, paying no regard to the fear of being defiled.

## 82

Through his love of money he lost the recognition of his being of high caste, and the other being an outcaste. So that, if he saw any gain coming to hand, he would even accept the food of an outcaste.

## 83

Because of his love of money, he did not consider a sin as a great fault. The love of even a *kavadi* made him a fool. He did not bring to mind his great impending fall into Hell.

## 84

Thus he became neglectful of duties, a doer of evil deeds, an ignorer of religious rites, a great knave, a great swindler, a pure rascal, and a lover of money.

85

If there came from any one a hindrance to his obtaining wealth, his anger raged, and he was quite ready to kill even a Brahman or a cow (to accomplish his purpose).

86

Anger has its abode in a lover of wealth. Sins are associated with wealth. He who is a lover of wealth is known as one of miserly character.

87

This miser accumulated immense wealth, but it was like giving up his very life to spend of it even what was necessary. He had no other thought (but wealth).

88

Just as one cannot extract the kernels of *harabara* grain from out of the mouth of a monkey, so long as it is alive, so to spend any money whatever was like death to this miser.

89

Lest any of the rice for domestic use should be otherwise spent, no part of it went for an offering to the fire. Hence if a guest happened to come, who was there to pay him reverence, at any time!

90

But if a guest was announced, he would utter such words as would kill by the very hearing of them. Who then would think of asking of him water or food?

91

*Brahmacharis* looked at his house with indifference. *Sannyasis* give up all expectation, and felt towards him as a royal swan feels towards cowdung.

92

Beggars ceased to pass his door. Chance guests even left him aside. Visitors sought lodgings at a distance elsewhere, and the Heavenly Ancestors had no hopes at all for food.

93

No one came to his door for uncooked rice. The rats left the house. The crows flew away from his abode. Sparrows could find no grain.

94

Ants had to continually fast, and they too had to change their lodgings to another place. If he would not eat sufficiently himself, what would naturally befall his household?

95

Where the lord of the house is unwilling to eat so much as parched *harbard*, even though keenly hungry, what must be the plight of the servants in such a house! Even wife and children fainted from hunger.

96

After having vomited, he would not even eat fruit, for he could not bear the thought of such expense. Rather he chose to fast.

97

This avaricious man never honoured his family *guru*, never carried out the family religious duties, never gave a feast to his relatives, never paid respect to his sons-in-law, nor his children's fathers-in-law.

98

At harvest time, even when fruits were abundant, he only saw them with his eyes in the market-place, but under no circumstance would he ever allow them to touch his tongue.

99

He did suck his mother's breast (when a child), but that was the only milk his tongue ever tasted. For after that this avaricious man held to his resolution to absolutely refuse milk .

100

A sweet juice is the mother-home of the tongue. Without it the tongue suffers distress, but his avariciousness was so cruel that he quarrelled with his own tongue, not allowing it and any sweet juice to come together.

101

His clothes were dirty and in tatters. His head was always unclean. His breath was offensive for even in his dream he would not chew the *pansupari*.

102

On festivals, special days *divali* and *dasara*, he furnished his household with old *jondhala* grain. He let his children suffer from lack of food. The name Miser fitted him exactly."

### Family and Friends Turn Against the Miser

103

Seeing him thus avaricious, irreligious and miserly in character, his own relations turned against him. How this happened Hari (Krishna) relates as follows.

104

"One who lacks all inclination to the performance of his special religious duties, one who cuts off all former givings to others, such a one is an extremely avaricious man, and men speak of him as an ill-natured man.

105

One who not only leaves his family without food and clothing, but himself also, and will even maltreat himself, is indeed rightly called a miser.

106

It is especially a wife who turns against her miser husband, but so also do relatives, servants, and children turn against such.

107

Even his own brothers become opposed to such, and start continual quarrels in the division of wealth.

108

Although with unmeasured wealth in his possession, yet he never even invited his married daughter back home on any festal occasion; in her anger she hotly cursed him.

109

His relatives think to themselves, 'it would be a good thing if he died, we could then at least enjoy rice and milk.' Those of his own kin become his enemies. All begin to wish him evil."

### Ghost-protected Wealth

110

The wealth that does not have the protection of right use, soon wastes away. Just how, Hari relates as follows.

111

"Just as a ghost neither eats, nor gives to eat, of buried wealth, nor puts forth his hands to use it any way, just so is it with a miser's buried wealth. He stands guard over his house as does a ghost over buried wealth.

112

An avaricious man, without any love for performing the duties of life, is like a ghost. His wealth is called ghost-wealth, for he regards his property as dearer to him than his own life.

113

The miser allows himself no bodily enjoyments; therefore, his earthly existence becomes of no value. And as his own proper religious duties, and the Five-Sacrificial Acts are unperformed, his life hereafter becomes also of no value."

### The Five Sacrificial Acts

114

There are five to whom the sacrifice of wealth is to be made. (God, Spirits, Rishis, Ancestral Beings, and Mankind). If these do not receive their share of the sacrifice, these five partners become angry, and are ready to destroy that wealth.

115

Although one attains the noblest birth of Brahmanhood, yet through avariciousness fails in his religious and social duties, he becomes a fallen being in both worlds (this and the hereafter), and has to pass through suffering because of his miserliness.

116

With great effort one may collect earthly wealth, but because of unrighteous living, destruction comes upon him. Just how, Hari relates as follows:-

### The Five Partners of Wealth

117

"If one neglects the goddesses (presiding over) the Five-Sacrificial-Acts, by his failure he cuts away the root cause through which wealth is acquired.

118

The acquisition of wealth through good deeds may be likened, to the glorious sun. When the sun, as right acquisition of wealth, sets, Darkness, as wrong use of wealth, becomes intense.



119

If to the wealth heaped up by great effort, there comes the night with its darkness of unrighteousness, the goddesses of the Five-Sacrificial-Acts become angry, and then in five ways that wealth is destroyed.

120

He who does not make his own family happy; he who does not give pleasure to himself through various enjoyments, his money in acts of charity, against him the five-claimants of wealth become aroused.

121

These five are Relatives, Thieves, the King, Fire, and Disease through wrong living. These five claimants of wealth come forward to destroy wealth.

122

He who does not show reverence to Brahmans with due devotion; he who does not perform the proper public religious rites; he who does not give in charity as prescribed in the *Vedas*, the destruction of his wealth becomes a certainty.

123

Where no respect is paid to one's parents, where the Five-Great-Sacrificial-Acts are unperformed; where disrespect is paid to one's *guru*, there expect destruction, O Uddhava.

124

They who hate others; they who insult others; they who are swollen with the pride of wealth, the destruction of their wealth will always take place, O Uddhava."

### The Miser Loses His Wealth

125

Now the ways in which the destruction of the miser's wealth took place is

described to his *bhaktas*, with scriptural authority by Shri Krishna Himself, perfect in His compassion, as follows:-

126

"The Miser's wife and sons conspiring together, made away with some of his secreted money. All of his clan joined together and forcibly divided some of his wealth among themselves.

127

Burglars broke into his house and took away his store of treasures. His house took fire, and an immense amount of his property was destroyed.

128

Pests destroyed his grain fields. He suddenly failed in his business affairs. Those he trusted made away with what was entrusted them. His promissory notes were lost.

129

As camphor placed in jars evaporates, as ships are lost at sea, so misfortunes fell also on his partners. There was disaster on every side.

130

Swindlers got hold of him in private and passed false coin on him. Because of this passion of love of money, he allowed the wealth he had to get into their hands.

131

In the conflicts between his own country's armies and those of outside enemies, his house was dug into; his treasures hid in the cellar were removed, carried away by the baskets full.

132

Rain leaked into his grain cellars and rotted all his grain. Violent men contended with him and took away his fields. He became thus one smitten by Fate.

133

Diseases attacked the cattle in his stables. His herds of cows and buffaloes died. He who took away his stable horses, without paying for them, fell on the battle-field in the great war.

134

Those who bury treasures in the ground dig up the soil, drawing it up towards them. Then placing the treasure in the hole cover the mouth of it with the earth.

135

Reason, however, often says, "mark the mouth of the hole with a stone." For after having thus absolutely obliterated the place of the hidden treasure, there comes a time when they desire to repossess themselves of the treasure.

136

\* But the miser now found that the earth itself had entirely swallowed up all his various hidden treasures. Fortune had so turned against him that he could not find the place where he had buried them.

### The Miser's Bodily Appearance Changes

137

By wrong doing his good fortune was wasting away. Even his bodily appearance now seemed deformed. Even his complexion changed.

138

Those who looked at him would say "Of what caste are you?" Although he would reply, "I am a Brahman", the hearer would not accept the answer, for the marks of caste superiority had disappeared.

139

Thus all his wealth became totally destroyed, and the nobility of his Brahmanhood was lost. He was now sad of countenance, poor, humiliated, marked by sorrow and the intensity of grief.

### The Miser Becomes a Despised Man

140

His fields were now gone; his ancestral lands disappeared; his very house was in ruins through the ravages of the enemy army. All his wealth was destroyed, not a *kavadi* being left. Such disaster was the natural result of wrong doing.

141

There had been no discharge of his rightful duties, no giving to others, and no use of his wealth for purposes scripturally prescribed. And so the property of this avaricious man vanished, just like the wealth which a poor man possesses in his dreams.

142

Fortune turned against him. Behold the sad condition of that unfortunate man! Wife and children turned against him, and peremptorily drove him away.

143

Notice! This avaricious man, to begin with, had no intimate outside friends, and what pleasure could his own family relations take in him? With disrespect they also drove him away from them.

144

People insulted him to his face. Women and children spat on him. He could get nothing whatever to eat. He begged, but received nothing.

*145*

Wherever he attempted to beg for food they would say "You ill-starred wretch! What have you come here for? You were deceived by the love of wealth. God had well robbed you of it now!

*146*

Thus people spurned him. With the loss of wealth he became a beggar. He fell into a whirlpool of anxiety. Sorrow upon sorrow came upon him.

### The Miser Repents

*147*

Although the wealth of this avaricious man had vanished, yet the memory of that wealth had not vanished. As he thought of it, his heart was torn to pieces. Through intense grief his mind was in a turmoil.

*148*

This turmoil, through intense grief, was just like the writhings of a serpent when a thorn has pierced its head, or like that of a lizard when its tail is broken off, or like that of a fish out of water.

*149*

As he thought of his lost wealth, he broke out into sobs. Streams of tears flowed from his eyes. He frequently fainted away.

*150*

In his mental grief he chafed and fumed. At times he would weep bitterly. He would stand up, sit down, look about, fall down, roll on the ground, sputtering all the while, and making a loud outcry.

*151*

Then finally he would exclaim "Alas! Now indeed I have become a child of misfortune. O Brahmadeva, you malicious being! What evil fortune have you written on my forehead?

152

I have now no home anywhere. I cannot think what is to become of me in the future." And with this thought of the intense sorrow that had fallen upon him, this very sad man burst into crying.

153

"And yet" he said to himself "this pain that I suffer here in this life is but small. A greater pain awaits me hereafter. Yama will cruelly beat me. Who will deliver me from Him ?

154

I have given nothing of my wealth to others. I have not remembered Narayana (God). Now the terrors of Hell are before me. Who there will deliver me?

155

I have not performed the Five-Great-Sacrificial-Acts. I gave no food to unexpected guests. I performed no sacrifice for the fathers-in-heaven. Now who will save me from my distress ?

156

I did not show reverence to Brahmans. I did not worship Adhokshaja (Vishnu). I did not bow down to the dust of the feet of the Vaishnava saints. Who will now destroy my accumulated sorrow ?

157

I am altogether a wrong-doer. I am sinking! I am sinking into a horrible pit! O hasten, and come to me, O Shri Hari! Save me, a poor wretch!

158

Krishna, Madhava, Murari, Ananta, Shri Hari, Thou-of-the-Eagle-Banner, Thou-who-held-up-Mount Govardhana, save me ! a poor wretch.

159

Thou didst protect Prahlad. Thou didst protect Ambarishi from lying in the womb. Thou didst care for Parikshiti while in the womb. So save me a poor wretch.

160

Thou didst save Ahalya. Thou didst save the sinful Ajamila. Thou didst leap to the help of Gajendra. So with that same haste rush to save me.

161

By Thy name Thou didst save that vile pimp (Pingala), whose life was a course of greatest sins. So O Chakrapani (Krishna), by that same miraculous power, save me, a wretched sinner!

162

Damn! Damn! this desire for wealth! Because of it my life has been spent in vain. The name of Ram free without cost, I, a vile wretch, did not repeat.

163

By the power of Ram's name ten millions of great sins are burnt away. But I, the one great vile wretch of the universe, did not repeat his name with my lips."

### The Miser's Self Condemnation

164

Thus recognizing his transgression, he repented with deep sorrow. And there arose in him an intense loathing of wordly objects. How he expressed it, Govinda (Krishna) relates as follows.

165

Wringing his hands, he cried, "Alas! Alas! Possession of a Brahmin's body is a

part of the scheme of salvation. Yet though attaining it, I, a vile miser, have been deceived through the trickery of the love of wealth.

166

I have given pain to that Brahman body, through which it is possible to enjoy the happiness of salvation. A lover of wealth, I am a supreme fool. There is no other fool greater than I am.

167

Instead of spending wealth in benevolence, I wasted my efforts in adding to wealth. And now this is the result of my possession. It has brought me the fruit of bitter sorrow.

168

What a great marvel is this love of money! It gives you neither this life nor the next. The happiness of present salvation is lost, and there is before one the suffering of an unescapable Hell.

169

Behold a Hell so deep, that if one should sink in it for a whole *kalpa*, one would not reach its bottom. Into such a Hell the love of money casts one, and I added that Hell to my human life.

170

He who is born with a Brahman body is honoured in the Three-worlds. Salvation bows at his feet. But I, unfortunate wretch, have wasted my opportunity.

171

The wealth, which I heaped up through the love of it, has altogether disappeared. It has made me supremely miserable. It has bound me, and given me over to Great Hell.



172

I received a superior birth. I have made it of no account through this love of money. Now in the midst of the fierce fire of remorse I see my life as already passed away.

173

By my excessive love of money all my strenuous efforts have ended in vain. But I now feel an intense disgust of worldly things arising in me, very sincere and reasonable.

174

I now feel that an avaricious man is a vessel fit for every sort of pain. A slave to wealth is a low wretch indeed!" Thus with his own lips he reviled himself.

### The Converted Miser Denounces Avarice

175

"It is a general rule that a slave to wealth has no happiness in this life. In the act of protecting his wealth he suffers intensely, and if it leaves him, it is like death to him.

176

In accumulating wealth there are great difficulties. In protecting it also there are great conflicts with others. In the loss of wealth there comes a breaking of the heart. A lover of money has to suffer in this life.

177

And not only has he suffering in this life, but because of his wrong doings his way is blocked for the life-to-come. When the lover of wealth dies, hell of a certainty crushes down upon his breast.

178

He who will not give in charity to others, nor even eat properly himself; he who is a miser, as I have been, has only increasing pain before him. A miser can hope for no happiness or comfort.

179

Where the lust for money has its abode there is no happiness even in one's dreams. Just for money is most contemptible." This the miser explained with his own lips.

*Bhikshugita*, 16th century

*Tz* by Justin E. Abbott

## Crucifixion and Resurrection

THOMAS STEPHENS

THOMAS STEPHENS (1549-1619) is the author of *Krist Puran* (Krist Purān). The tradition of Christian writing in Marathi began with Father Stephens' *Krist Puran* in 1614. He came to India in 1579. For about forty years, he worked as a priest in the Salsette part of Goa. He achieved excellent mastery over Marathi and Konkani languages and wrote in English a grammar of the Konkani language. His style testifies to his scholarly study of Jnaneshwar and other Marathi saint poets.

*Krist Puran* employs this style of the saints in the *ovi* form and narrates the life of Jesus Christ. Like other Marathi saints, this Jesuit priest has also described the greatness of the Marathi language in this work.

Two excerpts are given below: the first, dealing with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, is from Canto II of Part II and the second, about the Resurrection of Christ, is from Canto III.

1

### Crucifixion

Merciful Salvador Jesus the Lord  
Straining step by step steadily  
climbed up  
the Mount of Calvary.

There was a custom there in the past  
to serve every convict with wine

to put his mind to rest  
before he was done to death.

But the ruthless Jews  
made an awfully bitter mix  
of wine and myrrh  
and gave Jesus to drink.

Finding it awful to taste  
He could drink but just a little  
not really enough  
to quench His thirst.

Then from His shoulders two soldiers quickly  
brought down the cross and laid it on the ground  
to prepare it for nailing  
His hands and feet to it.

After that the armed soldiers  
holding Jesus gruffly took off His clothes —  
clothes which were glued to His body  
from His congealed blood.

Blood spurted out again  
as the soldiers peeled off His attire;  
inflicting his entire body  
with new pain.

Thus bequeathing His flesh and blood.  
the compassionate Master  
stood unclad—unruffled  
amidst the rabble of men.

His wounded body  
with blood all over  
looked red  
from head to heels.

Two soldiers then holding Jesus  
put Him supine on the cross—  
but His hands and feet,  
He stretched willingly on the cross!

A soldier then advanced  
holding a hammer and a nail in his hand  
to pierce one palm of Jesus  
to nail it to the cross.

And then that soldier  
as the other held His hand and feet—  
deftly struck the nail  
to pierce it through the palm of Jesus.

His flesh, veins and joints got ruptured  
and jets of blood sprang up,  
and Jesus collapsed shrieking  
in unfathomable pain.

And as our Lady heard the clanging hammer  
Her heart began splitting in pain  
and a harrowing ache  
swelled up deep from her vitals!

Her lotus face had become  
like the cloud-crowded-sky of the rainy days,  
with waves of sorrow surging over her,  
She began to sink in the sea of grief!

After pinning the first palm  
that soldier went for the second spike  
and pierced the second palm;  
which doubled His pain.

Nailing the palms  
the two soldiers brought a much longer nail  
and kept His one foot over the other  
and, as one held His two feet together.

The second soldier hit the nail  
driving it through His feet into the cross  
Oh! Jesus only knows  
How terrible the pain was!

Thus they nailed the hands and feet,  
making a cross of the loving Son of God—

a blood-drenched cross  
from where the earth absorbed His blood!

Then the soldiers stood up  
yelling in unison  
and lifted up the cross erect  
to fix its base into the pit.

With all his weight His body lunged  
widening the wounds of His hands and feet  
and Jesus the life of the world thus  
was lifted up above all for all eyes to see!

Blood began to flow in all directions  
and came down on the earth—  
the blood of Jesus that destroys  
the heaps of sins.

Praise and worship the Saviour's precious blood  
flowing from Heaven to earth  
worthy to redeem all men.  
In awe bow down! Bow down in humility!

Come all of you who are thirsty  
and drink the water of eternal life here,  
about which Prophet Isaiah writes:  
Drink the holy water His hands have offered.

Accept from the saviour's fountain  
the free gift of the sweet water of life,  
which destroys the impurities of the soul.

Then they hung with the Lord  
two robbers on their crosses;  
one on His right hand, the other on His left—  
Jesus the Master in the centre!

Thus He who dwells in Trinity  
was now on the cross  
between the two robbers  
crucified on the Mount of Calvary!

He the Lord of creation  
whom hosts of angels worship in Heaven  
became one  
like the robbers.

He was the one whom his disciples saw  
transfigured on the Mount of Tabor  
shining in heavenly glory  
between the two prophets.

Today He hangs on the cross  
on the Mount of Calvary  
with blood all over His body,  
between the two robbers.

Then Pilate wrote a superscription  
about Jesus which said  
that He was :  
Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews.

What made him write these words  
first in Hebrew and then in Latin  
and nail these on the cross  
over the head of Jesus?

And when the Jews read out these words  
they were furious and asked Pilate  
not to write of Him  
as the king of the Jews.

But to write in stead  
how insolently  
He said about Himself that  
He was the King of the Jews.

But Pilate answered them sternly;  
What I have written  
I have written, and  
Now that cannot be changed!

It wasn't really Pilate  
who wrote those words about Jesus,

but God dictated him  
to write those words of Truth.

The three worlds call Jesus their Saviour.  
He is our true Saviour;  
he died on the cross  
to redeem us.

Among the Nazarenes He is the fresh shoot of life;  
so is He amongst the holy-lotus-flower-blooms  
surrounded all over eternally  
by God's Holy Spirit.

He is called the King of Kings, Sovereign Master,  
Almighty Lord of lords,  
the Lord of heaven and earth,  
Loving caring Father, our Shepherd.

And that's why  
Daniel the prophet writes about Him;  
As was prophesied He shall come from the Jews,  
but the Jews shall not accept Him.

Perhaps thereafter for God  
the Jews were no more His chosen people  
but all those who accepted him as their Saviour  
they will become his subjects.

Therefore hold Christ in faith  
and walk with our master in hand  
worshipping  
Jesus the Saviour, God of the world.

Let us pray to Jesus  
and ask Him to make us worthy  
of Heavenly freedom  
by destroying our sins.

Let the blessed hands of the Nazarene  
be a garland round our necks,  
and let us serve Him to receive strength  
to reap the fruits of righteousness.

Let's believe in Him  
for He only is our Heavenly protector,  
to whom God the Father has given  
all the authority in heaven and on the earth.

Such a Lord, our loving Saviour,  
the soldiers and many from the crowd did further disgrace!  
Listen carefully to  
what I am going to narrate.

By His cross were posted  
four soldiers as guards.  
Do you know what they did  
in front of the crucified Lord?

These four soldiers  
snatched the garments of Jesus  
and tore them to pieces  
and divided them amongst them.

But one garment still lay in the centre—  
a coat without seam that Our Lady  
wove with Her own hands  
which they found impossible to tear and divide.

### Resurrection

Faithfully I'll retell only  
what the evangelists and the credos record  
of how on the third day Christ came out alive  
and triumphant from the grave.

Hearken! For I will narrate,  
Like His disciples  
Who remember Him,  
the course of events.

My dear listeners, I'll tell you  
how the risen Lord  
without first meeting His disciples  
appeared first to Our Lady.



On that Saturday night  
in the month of April,  
when the full moon in its second day  
appeared in the midnight sky.

The Lord said to the soul in Limbo:  
whoever had been feeling happy here  
amongst his friends so far  
should now no more rely on that.

Know that My body was wounded  
and was drenched in blood  
and then My dead body was laid in sepulchre  
by kind-hearted Joseph and Nicodemus.

Here now my hour has come,  
I have conquered sin in the form of Satan  
after My victory over Sin,  
there remains only the victory over death!

Presently I will take out  
and give it glorious immortality  
and then I will arise  
and become alive.

Sad is My gracious Mother  
who suffered with Me to the end.  
Now I must redeem Her from the pang of separation  
by giving Her joy and happiness.

Also I'll cast off the illusions  
of my disciples,  
and reward their toils by bestowing  
the greatest bliss on their hearts.

So, for such a glorious redemption  
let us all together give up this pit—  
but before leaving this place for Earth  
let us first brighten it up with sunshine.

When the Son of Man spoke thus,  
the souls in Limbo were full of joy—  
the mighty joy of that place  
being indescribable.

Just then the followers  
moved out of Limbo with Him  
leaving it  
completely deserted.

Five thousand years of long captivity,  
an indescribable bliss of Heavenly freedom,  
that shattered the five-thousand-year old  
chains of all those lost in forlorn miseries.

Then accompanying Lord Jesus Christ  
the devotees and the angels of Limbo  
came out in columns,  
marching on His either side.

On one side were the angels  
and on the other were the devotees,  
singing hymns they marched across Limbo  
and reached the sepulchre.

There they surrounded Him  
showering flowers on Him  
singing and dancing  
with great joy.

In great harmony  
they celebrated with singing:  
thinking, this is the day that the Lord has made  
Let's celebrate it.

The joy of singing praises  
was felt not only by the angels and souls in Limbo  
but also by the angels in Heaven  
before God the Father's throne.

Then Jesus the triumphant Lord  
went into His sepulchre  
and began to speak of all that had happened  
to His own body:

My dear righteous body,  
My companion in suffering,  
you had to suffer for some time,  
but now you're about to receive infinite happiness.

Becoming immortal, you shall be blissful.  
Thus praising His own body  
He breathed life into it  
and entered it.

As a king who makes an entry in his court,  
so the Lord entered into His own body,  
and at once the dazzling beauty of the body  
began to radiate everywhere.

As the radiant sun shines  
amidst the pitch-dark dense clouds in the sky,  
and makes an opaque cloud glow  
in a beautiful light-dark hue.

That blessed body  
which was without soul  
began to glow  
when the Spirit entered into it,

Then the triumphant Lord,  
wearing a body well-proportioned,  
rose up and came out alive  
from the sepulchre.

Like our patriarch Joseph who, after his release  
from prison, became an ornament of beauty  
and pride of entire Egypt  
to become its ruler.

Like David, the son of Jesse,  
who entered the council hall  
victorious after the duel, holding up  
the head of Goliath in his hand.

Like valiant Samson, the supporter of Israel,  
chained in prison  
in the city called Gaza  
waiting for his hour during the night,

And when the hour had come  
what he did was to free himself  
by pulling down the gates of the town  
which he carried with him to the mountain high.

Thus the triumphant Son of God  
after conquering Death and Satan  
came out of the sepulchre  
valiant and victorious.

Like a lion that is sleeping in its den,  
where none can dare go and awaken it,  
for it is the master  
and will wake up from its sleep on its own.

The Lion of Judah similarly, you should know—  
went to sleep of His own will in the sepulchre,  
and none had that authority to awaken Him  
but He himself.

Thus Jesus becoming alive  
came out of the sepulchre  
to fulfill the desire of all the ages  
in the three worlds.

Meanwhile in Jerusalem  
the greatly saddened Mother of Jesus, sat mourning  
in a looming cloud of blind despair,  
in the dark interior of the house.

She remembered the calamity that befell her son:  
the cross, the thorns, the nails,  
the spear, the vinegar—  
all these she saw in her mind's eye.

The words that Jesus spoke from the cross  
perpetually resided in the temple of Her heart—  
His blood-drenched body on the cross  
created agony in Her heart.

Thus overwhelmed with great grief  
she suddenly heard near her  
extraordinary notes of  
melodious music.

Notes that urged the Queen of Heaven to rejoice,  
for He whom She had nursed in Her womb  
is alive again to return into the world  
true to his promise.

What hymns of ecstasy were those,  
 thought Our Lady amazed,  
 and presently  
 the body of Jesus began dazzling in glory!

That instant She saw Her Son  
 entire in God's sovereign goodness  
 blazing in the glory of perfection  
 shining amongst the angels.

Amidst the angelic hosts  
 Our Lady saw Jesus  
 shine like the full bright moon of winter  
 surrounded by a skyful of stars.

What did the Son of God say then?  
 He said: My dear Mother, be comforted—  
 I am truly your Son—  
 whom you see with your own eyes.

Hearing this Our Lady burst into tears—  
 tears of grief transfigured into tears of joy!—  
 And, Her entire mind  
 was infused with great joy!

As the night vanishes with the morning sunbeams,  
 so did vanish the Mother's grief at the sight of her son,  
 of Her risen Son—But, overwhelmed,  
 She was speechless with a choking throat!

From *Krist Puran*, 16th-17th century

Tr. by Chandramohan Bhaktul

## Selections

### RAMDAS

A contemporary of Tukaram, RAMDAS (Rāmdās, 1608-1681) was a saint of distinctive personality of the Shivaji period. He left home at the age of eight and spent twenty-four years of his life in study, asceticism and wanderings after pilgrimage. He then established a separate sect which worshipped Ramchandra and Hanuman. A major feature of the teachings of Ramdas is their combination of the this-worldly and the other-worldly. They emphasize a conscious, careful participation in the

world of practical affairs and also the need for spiritual upliftment. Ramdas established *mathas* and provided an organizational basis for his spiritual thoughts.

*Dasbodh*, running into 7751 *ovis*, is Ramdas's major work. In this book, we find his teachings about *paramartha* as well as about *prapanch*. *Karunashtaka*, a short work, expresses Ramdas's intense emotion of bhakti. In texts like *Asmani Sultani* and *Parachakra Nirupan*, Ramdas portrays the contemporary social scene. Ramdas's compositions are characterized more strongly by a prose style than by poetic qualities. This can be said to be in keeping with his role as a propagandist.

1

The Deed, Already done before, has to be done Again...

The deed, already done, has to be done again;  
What has already been contemplated has to be contemplated again;  
What has already been explained before.  
has to be explained again. (1)

To me, this has happened,  
What I had told them before has to be told again,  
For, what has been distorted  
has to be restored to my satisfaction. (2)

To keep the crowd in the sect integral  
So as to generate faith in others;  
Such remedial is the intent behind all this —  
The intent of the weal of the people. (3)

The prime concern is the elucidation of the deeds of God;  
A prudent course of action in politics is the second;  
The third is the alertness  
about everything. (4)

The fourth is discrimination;  
Clarify various doubts about your goal in the minds of others;  
Wrongs — small or great —  
should be pardoned. (5)

Know the heart of the other,  
Yet, remain detached;

Never deviate from ethics  
and justice. (6)

Draw the attention of the people consciously;  
Enlighten everyone of them;  
Keep up the business of life  
as much as you can. (7)

In the business of life, know the crucial times;  
Possess a great deal of patience;  
But do not get deeply involved  
in the business of life. (8)

Do expand your workaday-affairs,  
but, do not become their captive.  
Feign lowliness and stupidity;  
on your own. (9)

See the flaws in others but cover them up;  
Do not speak continuously of the vices in others;  
Seek the wicked,  
and leave them obliged. (10)

Do not give scope to eccentricity;  
Seek for various remedies;  
With persevering efforts,  
seek to attain the unattainable. (11)

Never let fall asunder the assembly;  
Resolve the given crisis;  
Do not over-debate  
with anybody. (12)

Know what the others desire;  
Suffer for others to the maximum;  
If sufferings become unbearable.  
leave the place and go elsewhere. (13)

Know the grief of others;  
Share it when you hear about it;  
Suffer the ups and downs  
for the sake of community. (14)

Vast must be your knowledge by heart,  
along with thinking of your own;  
Be always and ardently intent  
on helping others. (15)

Make peace, and see that many others make it;  
Renounce eccentricity, and make many others do so;  
Perform pious deeds, act yourself;  
make many others do so. (16)

If doing harm is inevitable,  
Never speak about it;  
Do it indirectly through someone else,  
and make your foe learn a lesson. (17)

He who does not suffer for the masses,  
Can hardly collect any people around him;  
He who suffers excessively for the masses  
only loses his importance. (18)

Resort a lot to prudent politics,  
Let others know nothing about it;  
Never set your heart  
on inflicting pains on others. (19)

Judge the people, and leave them well-judged,  
Shrewdly, make the proud shake off their conceit;  
Then, cleverly weave into the fabric again  
the threads that have gone astray. (20)

Keep the pugnacious at a distance;  
Never confide to the immature;  
If at all you encounter him,  
change your way, and avoid him. (21)

Such is the unusual nature of politics,  
Unique, when one begins to talk about it;  
Only he who has a serene heart;  
knows about it. (22)

Restore courage to the frightened,  
who has taken to the tree-top to save his life;  
Drive off the belligerent contemptuously;  
How can one explain this state of practical affairs? (23)



Search for such a diplomat; he cannot be easily found,  
 Fame will not bind him to any place;  
 He will never yearn for glory,  
 even if it comes his way. (24)

To support and defend one, and at the same time,  
 not to bear even the sight of the other;  
 Such an extremity  
 is not a sign of diplomacy. (25)

If you encounter one, who neither accepts the just  
 nor likes what is in his own interest,  
 you have no other way  
 but renounce him. (26)

May audience had clearly conceived all this,  
 yet they chose to doubt all this;  
 So, I had to tell them what had already been told. . .  
 In case of any flaw of excess, they should forgive me. (27)

*Karma Kelchi Karave*, 17th century

*Tr.* by Pradeep Gopal Deshpande

## 2

### Prayer to Rama for His Grace

Rue has riled me day after day, O God;  
 You, the most compassionate, resolve the rules and snares of this life  
 Wild and wanton, my mind foils all my attempts to rein it;  
 without you fatigue engulfs me; now quickly rush to me (1)

Devoid of hymns for you, I have wasted the whole of my life,  
 In vain have I sought interest in the kindreds, people and riches.  
 Affect my thinking and hold me close, Rama  
 Renouncing all, I ardently long to cling to you, anchor into you (2)

Your figure is my body, spirit and wealth, O Ram!  
 I find this entire mundane life, without you, a burden.  
 Never make my mind deviate from its course;  
 Through hymns of your deeds, I ardently pine for you. (3)

In spite of efforts, my love cannot be weaned from my kith and kin;  
Every now and then gets the resolve in my heart ruffled,  
That is why, so meekly do I speak and seek your compassion. (4)

From birth to birth for millions of years my heart has been burning life  
O, Raghava, surge over me the flood of compassion.  
Cool my feverish longing, Ram, the ocean of compassion,  
Sever my cord from the family of the six foes of the soul. (5)

Who else can possess so much pity for me, if not you?  
I have been waiting for you, exhausted and consumed;  
A lion that you are, swoop down instantly,  
for, in your absence, the jackals of desires abduct me. . . (6)

What content is there in family relations, wealth and people?  
My mind can dwell nowhere except in you, O Raghupati!  
Even the dear ones take my life, leave my corpse, and walk away;  
The sensuous desires delude and ruin me; and later beget me. (7)

People in this world are slaves to its wealth,  
How can I accept them as dear ones? This is the truth,  
In adverse times, they desert and leave me in wilderness,  
Raghava, O Bestower of happiness, redeem me in this final hour. (8)

*Karunashtak*, 17th century

*Tr.* by Pradeep Gopal Deshpande

### 3

#### First, Look after the Business of Life Neatly

First, look after the business of life neatly,  
And, then take the spiritual goal for consideration;  
Do not be indolent here,  
O judicious fold! (1)

If you renounce the business of life and pursue the spiritual goal,  
You will end in misery;  
Only if you strike a balance between the business of life  
and the spiritual goal, (2)

You are wise.

If you pursue the spiritual goal and renounce the business of life,

You will starve;  
How will, then, such a wretched starveling  
Achieve the spiritual goal? (3)

On the other hand, if you renounce the spiritual goal,  
And indulge only in the business of life,  
You will suffer the penal death-agonies,  
And, will be most miserable in the end. (4)

If you do not attend to your Master's work  
And dawdle indolently at home,  
The Master will flog you;  
People see it, that is evident, (5)

Then your dignity is lost  
And, for the scornful, you become a laughing-stock;  
Then profound grief comes your way,  
And frets your soul away. (6)

Such is the end of the Godless road,  
You must worship God, therefore;  
And only while in the business of life,  
Experience God in concrete terms. (7)

Only he, who is in the world, yet detached from it,  
Is a perfect combination of involvement and detachment;  
For, he alone can see,  
The proper from the improper. (8)

Only he, who is wakeful in the work-a-day existence,  
Will attain the spiritual goal;  
He, who is dishonest in the work-a-day existence,  
Is dishonest in his spiritual goal also. (9)

So, alertly strike the balance  
Between the business of life and the spiritual goal;  
If you do not do this,  
You will suffer a multitude of sorrows. (10)

Even a caterpillar confirms a place first and then crawls further;  
The entire animate world lives on reason;  
But some men, despite being what they are, stray to the path of error,  
What a pity. . . .! (11)

Therefore, you must possess foresight,  
And always make a scrutiny of the times ahead;  
Surmise with your reason what lies ahead,  
And mould your present accordingly. (12)

The watchful is always happy;  
The heedless becomes miserable.  
Such is the way of the world.  
Amplly evident. (13)

So, blessed is he who is all-alert,  
And great is his glory;  
For, he alone can hold people  
In content. (14)

If you show laziness in discerning life,  
And death takes you unawares,  
How will you get time enough  
To find your way out? (15)

So, behold the far-sighted men,  
Regard their reason;  
One earns wisdom  
Observing others only. (16)

So, identify the wise,  
Earn virtues from the virtuous.  
Mark the vices in others,  
And reject them. (17)

The wise man will never leave others unassessed;  
But, in doing so, will never offend others.  
He will quietly discriminate,  
Between the worthy and the vile. (18)

Apparently he is one among others,  
But seen carefully he is neatly wise and judicious;  
He can discriminate between the worthy and the unworthy,  
And knows both well. (19)

He quietly judges all,  
And honour the worth in everyman;  
This is his uniqueness,  
Respecting greatness in others proportionately. (20)

## Tuka Says

## TUKARAM

TUKARAM (Tukārām, c. 1608-1650), the great saint-poet of Marathi, was the son of Kanakai and Bolhoba, who belonged to the Shudra caste. He lost his wife Rakhambai and his son in the famine of 1630-31. Later he married Avalai, daughter of Appaji Gulave. Tukaram took to a spiritual life. He was influenced by Jnaneshwar, Namdev, Eknath, Kabir and Chaitanya. He was devoted to Lord Vitthala of Pandharpur. His *abhangas* are marked by intense devotion and are extremely popular even today. His contribution to the growth of the *Varkari* movement is immense.

## 1

## Autobiographical Abhangas

## i

Born as a Shudra by caste, I observed all that came to my lot,  
 I worshipped this God Vitthal, who has been worshipped in my  
 family from the beginning;  
 I was deeply aggrieved in the affairs of life, as my mother  
 and father ended their course;  
 The famine drained away my wealth,  
 My wife died, crying "food, food" on her death-bed;  
 I was ashamed and was tormented by this grief, as I  
 was losing in my business.  
 The temple of Vitthal was in ruins, I felt I should build it,  
 At first I did *kirtan* only on the Ekadashi day;  
 But, then my mind was not set in practice,  
 So I learned by heart, in full faith and with full respect;  
 Some sayings of the Saints,  
 I sang only the refrains in the *kirtan*, with pure heart and devotion;  
 I tasted the holy water on the feet of the saints,  
 And suffered no shame to creep into my mind,  
 I did a bit of good to others, whenever I could,  
 Not minding any physical hardships;  
  
 I paid no heed to what my friends advised,  
 I became heartily sick of the world;  
 I made my own mind testify to truth and untruth,  
 Never cared for the opinion of the majority.

I relied only upon the instructions my Guru gave me in a dream,  
 After this I was encouraged to compose poetry;

Which I did with full faith in Vitthal.  
 Then fell the blow of injunction, I was forbidden to write,  
 Thus for a while my spirit was grieved,  
 My poems were sunk in the river, and I sat fasting at the door of God.  
 And He ultimately consoled me.

It will be too long a story, so I will be brief.  
 Now I see the plan as it is,  
 What will occur in future, God knows;  
 It is certain that he shall never neglect his *bhakta*,  
 He is very kind, I have experienced that.

Tuka says, This is the capital of my life,  
 I speak out what Vitthal bids me speak.

*Tr.* by N. Bhalchandra Nemade

*ii*

My wife died and I was set free,  
 And God released me from illusion.  
 It is well that my son died,  
 And God released me from affection.  
 Mother died, with her eyes upon me,  
 And, Tuka says, my anxiety disappeared.

*Tr.* by N. Bhalchandra Nemade

*3*

We can gain nothing by seeing you  
 We would only be tired of walking .  
 We can hope to get food because begging is still better  
 Rags are still better  
 Stone is good for sleeping and the sky an excellent cover  
 We have no desire for anything and do not wish to waste life  
 We aspire for no honour of the palace as there is no content there  
 The lucky ones are honoured in the royal abode  
 The common people are rarely noticed  
 I almost die of shame  
 Looking at the well-dressed and the adorned  
 If you feel sad, hearing this,  
 Know that God has not neglected us  
 This is what I have to tell you

That there is no such happiness as there is in begging  
 Good men believe in penance and live free from desires  
 Tuka says, You are honoured  
 Because you have worshipped God in previous life.

*Tr. by M. D. Hatkanangalekar*

*iv*

I do not speak on my own, God the benevolent friend gives me tongue  
 The Salunki bird sings musically but the master who trains it is different  
 A humble creature as I am, what wise saying can I give?  
 It is only the Lord of the Universe who puts words in my mouth  
 Who can fathom the secret of His magic, says Tuka  
 He can make the lame move with legs.

*Tr. by M. D. Hatkanangalekar*

5

We return to our village  
 Let us bid farewell  
 This is our last meeting  
 From now onwards we part from life  
 We bow down at your feet  
 Be kind to us  
 When someone returns to his abode  
 Chant the name of Vitthala  
 Chant the name of Ram Krishna  
 Tuka ascends to Vaikuntha.

*Tr. by M. D. Hatkanangalekar*

6

I dreamed that I was impressed in a gang;  
 But when the dream ended,  
 It all turned out to be false.  
 I cried for mercy in vain.  
 that very cry was the source of my trouble.  
 King, noble and peasant — the whole picture was unreal,  
 but sufferings were real, till I awoke.

My bodily experiences witness it,  
for it was pain that made me open my eyes.  
Tuka says, The saints brought me to my senses at last;  
otherwise the lock-up was ready waiting for me.

*Tr. by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe*

7

'Tis well I was created a Kunbi,  
otherwise I should have perished of pride;  
thou hast done well, O Lord God.  
Tuka leaps to his feet and dances.  
If I had had any knowledge,  
I should have been in danger,  
I should have missed the service of holy men,  
I should have fallen into fruitless ignorance;  
I should have been puffed up with conceit,  
I should have followed the path of destruction.  
Tuka says, Where human greatness is,  
there follows hell, the punishment of pride.

*Tr. by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe*

8

Namadeva came with Panduranga,  
and roused me in a dream. "I appoint you a task,  
write poetry, do not talk of vain affairs."  
Namadeva counted his own verses,  
Vitthala kept the tally;  
he told me the total he arrived at, a hundred crores.  
"What is left undone, you must finish, O Tuka."

*Tr. by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe*

9

Blest is the village of Dehu,  
holy is that spot of earth,  
for there lives Panduranga, our God.  
Blest are the husbandmen there,  
Happy are they, who cry upon his name.



With his hand upon his hip  
 The father of the world stands there;  
 by his left is Rakhumadevi, our mother;  
 at the door stands Guruda with his hands joined together.  
 On the north is a peepul tree,  
 on the south stands the Ling of Shankar;  
 beautiful is the bank of the holy stream Indrayani.  
 There is the wood of Lakshminarayana Balla,  
 Where the Lord of perfection dwells.  
 Without is Bhairava, who smooths the way, with  
     Hanumanta near at hand.  
 There do I, Tuka, preach and sing, with the feet of  
 Vitthoba in my heart.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

2

### Yearning for Vitthala

*i*

The daughter given away in marriage proceeds to her in-laws' house  
 keeps on looking back ever again.  
 Similar is the state of my mind; when would you meet me, O Keshava!  
 Just as the child looks around tremulously for the misled mother  
 So does Tuka look for his Vitthala  
 Like a fish taken out of water  
 Tuka turns and tosses.

*Tr.* by M.D. Hatkanangalekar

2

There is aridity in all directions and I feel lost  
 None is near and dear to me.  
 On seeing a crowd of ferocious creatures  
 Terror strikes me. I feel unnerved, O Panduranga.  
 Because of Darkness, I cannot walk my way  
 For fear of thorns and thistles hurting me  
 I can forge ahead on my own, I am not afraid  
 Now that the master has shown me the path and  
 Panduranga stands apart.

*Tr.* by M. D. Hatkanangalekar

## 3

My heart yearns to meet and waits for you day and night  
 Just as the yearning of the Chakor is to see the full moon  
 So does my heart look for you  
 The married daughter living with her in-laws looks forward  
 to invitation from her parents for the Divali  
 So does Tukaram look forward to Vitthala  
 Just as the hungry child cries deeply for his mother  
 I too am hungry, says Tuka, so rush to me and reveal your  
 adorable face to me.

*Tr. by M. D. Hatkanangalekar*

## 4

The magic stone by its virtue has turned common metal into gold;  
 even so, O Lord of Pandhari, consider not my faults or shortcomings.  
 The Ganges does not charge with impurity  
 a filthy stream that runs below a village.  
 Tuka says, Common earth is valued  
 If musk has imparted its odour into it.

*Tr. by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe*

## 5

Come, Panduranga, lift me up and set me in your lap;  
 though I have sought this shelter,  
 I feel myself a stranger.  
 Set me free and carry me, with you, O God;  
 there is no force that can thwart your purposes.  
 Tuka says, O Lord of the Senses,  
 why do you delay?

*Tr. by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe*

## 6

What are you waiting for ?  
 Step forward now; let me set my head at your feet;  
 I stand before you with folded hands:

Grant me that goodly union with you;  
 let not our love be severed,  
 Tuka says, Come forward, O Vitthala!

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

## 7

One may gain distinction and popular honour and fill one's  
 stomach by false behaviour;  
 but a man will not gain his true ends by these means.  
 If I embrace this grandeur of knowledge,  
 I shall be severed from your feet,  
 In cherishing the body the passions break forth;  
 my enemies dwell within myself.  
 Why should I destroy myself by pride and regard for public esteem?  
 Tuka says, O God, grant me this happy rite,  
 to look upon your feet.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

## 8

I enjoy no pleasure. I need no honour--this world passes.  
 What shall I do? Luxuries set my flesh on fire;  
 sweet food is poison to me. I do not like to hear my praises  
     when men extol me;  
 they weary my soul.  
 Tell me how to reach you;  
 let me not be swallowed up in the mirage of the world.  
 Tuka says, Do good to me now,  
 take me out of the flame where I burn.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

## 9

While the serpent is entranced by his flute,  
 the charmer pounces on him;  
 he keeps him confined in a cage for a dwelling place,  
 and goes wandering from door to door to fill his own belly. \*  
 Such is my state, O Panduranga;

I am prisoner, O set me free!  
 Nothing can I do for myself, unless you take compassion on me.  
 The fish gets the hook stuck in his throat  
 because he swallows the bait;  
 when he is drawn forth he strives to take breath.  
 What are his father and mother to him then?  
 A bird is snared by her desire to approach her young;  
 as she looks on them, she is caught fast in the net;  
 while she runs towards them with fond affection,  
 she thinks not of death, she saves neither herself nor her brood.  
 Through his love of sweets a fly is caught in a trap,  
 and then he goes on fluttering wildly.  
 Tuka says, My soul is possessed by desire;  
 O dweller in Pandhari, take pity on me!

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

10

I sit at the door waiting for him with my hand upon my brow.  
 My thoughts and eyes are fixed upon the road to Pandhari,  
 When shall I see him coming ?  
 I count the hours and minutes on my fingers.  
 My left eyelid itches; my right arm throbs;  
 my mind in its impatience forgets my body.  
 I have no pleasure in my bed,  
 I forget house and wife, hunger and thirst.  
 Tuka says, Blessed will be the day  
 when I see a messenger coming from Pandhari.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

3

### Remonstrances With God

*i*

This thy knowledge of Brahma I need not;  
 enough for me is the form visible and lovely.  
 A saviour of the sinful, why dost thou tarry ?  
 Hast thou forgotten thy promise?

I have burned up the world, and here I sit in my yard;  
 is it not in thy mind or heart? Tuka says, Be not angry, O Vitthala;  
 rise up and meet me now.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

*ii*

Hear me, O Panduranga,  
 I would say something to you by yourself.  
 If our store of spirit is to save us,  
 what place is left for you?  
 Will people think the act worthy of honour?  
 If a man gives himself credit for it,  
 he will gain nothing by his concert;  
 we ought to feed a man who wants food.  
 A beggar is the right person to feed and the gift is appropriate.  
 Gratitude is due to a wise liberality,  
 When a man gives where he has no hope of getting back.  
 Be assured that the man is rightly called brave  
 who puts the lowly behind his back and protects him;  
 the merit of that noble act is boundless.  
 Listen to my words, O Narayana! Now what more shall I say?  
 If you save me, then I will call you great.  
 Fulfil your own words, says Tuka, then I shall know you.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

*iii*

We have paid off our debt by offering you our faith.  
 You now must satisfy our cravings and make us your darlings.  
 This is our rule, and this the duty you owe to us.  
 Tuka says, We know the service that is required of us.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

*iv*

Where will you hide yourself when I claim my portion?  
 The saints will bear witness to my claims,  
 for they know the signs of just rights.

I will sit at your doors like a creditor and will not suffer  
you to come out.

Tuka says, I am imperishable;  
you have to bear the burden of your Godhead.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

v

Methinks you have turned forgetful;  
but we remember your pledges;  
you display your title of Saviour,  
but, tell me, how will you explain it?  
I am not, like you, hungry after wealth;  
I shall talk of anything else and chase away that desire.  
Tuka says, I shall renounce the body;  
I shall wave it round you together with pride and cast it away.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

4

### Joy after the Vision of Vitthala

i

The mind has become still and the movement of life slow  
Because the mark within has been known  
The eyes are half-closed because of unusual brightness  
The throat is choked and the body hairs are raised  
The soul is engrossed in the divine form and my heart  
does not come out of bliss  
The daybreak is bright with blue light and the soul  
drinks deep at the fount of nectar  
Life is given as an offering to the sun and the moon  
And tidal waves of joy rise above one another positively  
I am swaying in blissful love, says Tuka, I am dissolved  
in ultimate certainty.

*Tr.* by M. D. Hatkanangalekar

*ii*

I have seen my self dying with my own eyes  
 That indeed was an unrivalled celebration  
 The three worlds were brimful with bliss  
 I rejoiced in it like the Universal Soul  
 I was bound by egoism and confined to one part  
 When I gave it up, there followed a season of plenty  
 The ritualistic quarantine following death and birth is over  
 I have shrunk within and fallen apart  
 Narayan has given me a habitation, trusting him  
     I dwell at his feet  
 Tuka says, I imprint on the world whatever  
 I have imbibed from Him.

*Tr.* by M. D. Hatkanangalekar

*iii*

In the deep waters of joy, the ripples are of joy only  
 Something unprecedented has happened and I have no  
     desire to walk ahead  
 What the child in the womb likes, the mother desires  
 The affection is reflected from within  
 In like manner, says Tuka, the mould is cast  
 And the experience assumes a face.

*Tr.* by M. D. Hatkanangalekar

*iv*

Minuter than the atom, Tuka is as big as the sky  
 I swallowed the dead body, the very image of worldly illusion  
 And spilled it out  
 I have renounced the trinity of knowledge, the knower  
 and the knowable  
 There is illumination in heart,  
 Tuka says, I remain now only to be of use to others.

*Tr.* by M. D. Hatkanangalekar

v

The trees, the creepers and the animals of the forest  
 have become kins to me  
 The birds too sing ever so sweetly.  
 Because of this, living in loneliness has become dear to me.  
 The attributes of good and bad are no longer attached to me  
 The canopy is the sky and the earth the throne  
 My mind seeks pleasure and plays there  
 The wind is the holy indication of time  
 My only meal is Harikatha, the variety of which  
 I create and relish  
 Tuka says, Here the mind speaks to the mind  
 And the only debate is debate with oneself.

*Tr. by M. D. Hatkanangalekar*

vi

Where I go  
 you are my companion;  
 holding my hand  
 you help me walk.  
 I seem to be walking  
 but it is only because of your  
 support that I walk.  
 You carry with you  
 my burden all along.  
 As I try to speak,  
 I utter incoherence;  
 you set it right.  
 You have removed my shyness,  
 made me bold.  
 All the men around  
 have become my protectors.  
 All are my kith and kin  
 dear to my soul.  
 Tuka says, I play fondly  
 Because of you I experience happiness  
 within and without.

*Tr. by M. D. Hatkanangalekar*



## vii

I shall humble those who claim the attainment of ultimate knowledge  
 and make the *muktas* give up their attained positions  
 In the performance of *kirtan*,  
 the whole body becomes the Brahma and,  
 most fortunate of all, God himself feels obliged.  
 I can make lazy those who go to various holy places  
 and can render their heavenly pleasure bitter.  
 I can humble those who pride themselves on their penance  
 and put to shame the rituals of *yajna* and charity.  
 I shall achieve *purushartha* through *bhakti* and love  
 which is the essence of the meaning of Brahma.  
 I shall make people admit that they have been fortunate  
 in seeing Tuka in this world.

*Tr.* by M. D. Hatkanangalekar

## viii

I have secured now the supreme union;  
 It is mine for ever; I will not abandon it;  
 the foundation is deep laid;  
 there is nothing further to reach beyond this point.  
 What was scattered is brought together again;  
 the books are balanced, the account is clear.  
 Tuka says, Henceforth I shall stop speaking.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

## ix

My spirit is infused into this essential juice of all;  
 my joy is unbounded;  
 in him who pervades the world  
 I have found father, family and bosom friend;  
 I recognize them all under one name;  
 I have cut myself free from faith in others.  
 Tuka says, By his name and form all guilt is purged away.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

*x*

Seeing nothing I have seen all;  
I have become one with all men,  
because I have kept myself far from me.  
Receiving nothing I have received all;  
Eating nothing I have been fed,  
my tongue has tasted a sweet savour.  
Though I speak not I am as one that speaks,  
making manifest the secret of my life.  
Tuka says, I have not heard with my ears,  
yet it has come into my mind.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

*xi*

O speech of mine, utter the sweet name of Vitthoba.  
O eyes, delight yourself with the sight of his face.  
O ears, listen to the attributes of my Vitthoba.  
O mind, run to him and rest at his feet.  
Tuka says, O my soul,  
forsake not this Keshava.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

### The Nature of God and the Power of God's Name

*i*

When you have the evidence of your mind,  
why do you need public opinion? You have your own  
advantage within yourself.  
The true faith you should hold  
is your own reflection that God pervades all, within and without you.  
With pure faith on your side,  
you need not abandon the world; the truth will come to light anywhere.  
The man who has tasted inward sweetness

values it; he cares no more for outward show,  
Tuka says, Pure faith brings this about;  
God will belong to those who possess it.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

*ii*

Be assured that this perishable body will be destroyed;  
why then do you not utter his name?  
Countless millions have been saved by his name,  
it has given them a place in Vaikuntha.  
There is nothing in the three worlds of such virtue as his name;  
why do you not recall it?  
Tuka says, His name is more glorious than the Vedas;  
Gopala has bestowed it on us freely.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

*iii*

Teachers themselves do not understand the secret of the Vedas;  
what authority do others possess?  
The name of Vitthoba is easily mastered;  
With one impulse it bears you over the sea of the world.  
The wise know well that charms are impracticable,  
likewise acts and seasons prescribed; other men are all foolish.  
Tuka says, We have lost sight of the commandments and prohibitions,  
this path has been annihilated.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

*iv*

Our mother Vithai is like a cool shadow;  
Her breast is ever filled with love;  
Seated in her lap I shall seek her bosom and drink as much as I desire.  
O yield the milk of your mercy and nourish my frame;  
a stream of nectar flows from you.  
My spirit cannot contain this joy;  
what is the whole sea compared to it?  
If we go astray she feels herself in danger;

with loving desire she protects us on every side. Tuka says,  
 I know not what care is;  
 I am Vitthal's dear babe.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

v

The mother understands the child's secret,  
 his joys, his griefs and all his actions. He who lends a support to a blind man,  
 he understands his purposes. He who has set a suppliant behind him,  
 he knows how to protect him. If one holds the girdle of a man in water,  
 he takes him over the stream without fatigue.  
 Tuka says, If a man has entrusted his lip to Vitthala,  
 he knows his condition.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

6

### The Glory of Pandhari

i

Be a pilgrim and gaze on Pandhari;  
 why need you practise other means of salvation?  
 you will gather the fruit in perfection from this.  
 No pride survives here; every craving is satisfied.  
 Tuka says, dark blue Vittho.  
 dwells before my eyes.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

ii

You cannot find sorrow at Pandhari,  
 though you wanted it for medicine;  
 the joy of love is ever present there.  
 Pundalika has established a market there,  
 he has brought thither all Vaikuntha.  
 In all dealings there, no loss overtakes one;  
 people make a profit that satisfies them.

There is enough for all the countryside;  
 it is stored in great heaps;  
 for ten miles round the land is fattened.  
 Tuka says, The saints are well contented;  
 they dwell for ever in Pandhari.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

*III*

Your beautiful figure stands akimbo on a single brick  
 clad in silken, sacred, yellow garment  
 a garland of Tulasi plant hangs round the neck.  
 This is the figure which is near my heart eternally.  
 Crocodile-shaped earrings shimmer brightly in the ears and  
 the precious Koustubh bead adorns the neck.  
 Tuka says, The whole bliss of my life is encased in this figure  
 I shall always look upon this adorable figure with affection.

*Tr.* by M. D. Hatkanangalekar

7

The Greatness of Bhakti

*i*

Without a worshipper,  
 how can God assume a form or accept service?  
 The one makes the other beautiful,  
 as a gold setting shows off a jewel. Who but God can make the  
 worshipper  
 free from desires? Tuka says, They feel to each other like mother and  
 child.

*ii*

What does the lotus flower know of its own perfume ?  
 The bee enjoys it all.  
 Thus you know not your own name,  
 but we know the happiness of love that proceeds from it.

The mother cow eats grass, but the calf enjoys the sweet milk;  
he enjoys who produces not. Tuka says, The pearl lies in the shell,  
but the shell cannot see or enjoy it.

*Tr. by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe*

*III*

Had I not been a sinner,  
how could there have been a Saviour? So my name is the source,  
and hence, O sea of mercy,  
comes your purifying power.  
Iron is the glory of the Parisa,  
else had it been but an ordinary stone. Tuka says, Through  
the petitioner's faith  
comes the honour of the tree of wishes.

*Tr. by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe*

*iv*

Your feet are everything to me;  
let me trust in you alone.  
I see your feet everywhere,  
the three worlds are pervaded by Vitthala.  
Discussions of your nature are a maze of errors;  
let me refuse to enter into them.  
Tuka says, There is no particle without you  
yet I see you are greater than space itself.

*Tr. by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe*

*v*

Vitthala, my friend, accompanies me and dwells in my soul;  
he pervades my frame; he is a shadow to me.  
He dwells on the tip of my tongue;  
I can speak of nothing else.  
The mind is prince above all organs;  
he too contemplates Vitthala.  
Tuka says, Now I can never forget this Vitthala.

*Tr. by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe*

*vi*

O God, listen to my prayer,  
do not grant me liberation!  
This joy exceeds that other,  
desired of men though it be.  
In the homes of we followers of Vishnu  
the happiness of love desires to rest;  
prosperity and accomplishment stand with folded  
hands at our doors.  
Grant me not to live in Vaikuntha, for that pleasure may pass away;  
but unspeakable is the sweetness of your name when your praises  
are sung.  
O dark as the clouds, you know not the glory of your own name.  
Tuka says, It is that which makes life sweet to us.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

*vii*

They take a lamp and go looking for darkness.  
The wonder is they believe they have found it.  
We servants of Vishnu fear not time and death;  
we have left the mirage of the world;  
it never overtakes us.  
If you raise a cloud of dust, you defile the sunlight;  
O ill-starred creatures, cannot you perceive this?  
Tuka says, I am covering up fire with a heap of straw;  
my words are idle.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

*8*

## The Necessity of Experience

*i*

There are three ways of perception;  
first, as when one carries a load;  
then, from hearsay; last, through personal experience.  
A man's reward is according to his faith;

It is but water that falls when the sun is in Arcturus,  
yet it becomes a pearl.  
It is one thing to see food, or talk of food,  
and another thing to take food, — a very different thing.  
Tuka says, A diamond is a diamond to one who can tell it;  
it is a flint for a fool.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

*ii*

Milk is sweet itself;  
but the taste of sugar enhances it;  
be assured that the knowledge of God resembles this;  
it is feeble without devotion.  
Food without salt has no savour;  
to have the scholar's credit is like the efforts of a blind man to see.  
Tuka says, The essential part of a *tambura* is its dead wires.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

*iii*

What good will Kashi and the Ganges do you,  
if you are not pure within?  
If you put hard gram in boiling water,  
it does not change; it gains no flavour, it will not cook.  
What will a man gain by garlands and marks on his forehead,  
if he is vile and void of faith?  
Tuka says, A man who talks without love is merely barking;  
his words are ineffective.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

*iv*

A golden plate is filled with sugar and milk,  
and given to a god to drink;  
a necklace of pearls is hung about an ass;  
musk is plastered on a hog.  
A reciter of the Vedas utters wisdom to a dead man,  
how can he tell his meaning?



Tuka says, He alone understands a thing who truly possesses it;  
the Sadhu alone understands the glory of devotion.

*Tr. by Nelson Frazer and K.B. Marathe*

*v*

Be satisfied with inward pleasure;  
What need is there in chattering about it?  
This business of rules and prohibitions is heart-breaking;  
without the sweetness of spiritual experience both teacher  
and taught increase their tribulation.  
In your own mind you think this talk of experience madness,  
but you do not alter its value.  
If you would attain to means of salvation,  
be calm and silent.  
Tuka says, verbosity has ruined crowds of Brahmanas.

*Tr. by Nelson Frazer and K.B. Marathe*

*vi*

Wrap up and put away your knowledge;  
here faith is what you must trust to.  
If you follow One,  
all is accomplished for you, the Lord of Pandhari assures you thereof.  
There is no room here for arguments, right or wrong;  
no room for painful efforts.  
Tuka says, Unless faith accompanies it,  
whatever men say is weariness.

*Tr. by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe*

*9*

### Importance and Greatness of Saintly People

*i*

We have our abode in Vaikuntha  
We have descended for this purpose

Which is to act out truly  
 Whatever was uttered by saints  
 We wish to sweep clean the paths for saints  
 The world is full of devious wild growth  
 We would gladly accept with relish  
 The left-overs of the saints.  
 The hidden meaning of the scriptures is lost  
 And knowledge is destroyed by inane words  
 Minds are drawn to sensual pleasures  
 The means of gaining Moksha are forgotten.  
 We will beat the drums of bhakti  
 And frighten even the God of Death  
 Tuka says, Let us sing  
 The glory of God's name.

Tr. by M. D. Hatkanangalekar

*ii*

As devotees of Vishnu, we are softer than wax  
 but if need be, strong enough to break even the Vajra.  
 Though dead, we are alive and though asleep we are awake.  
 We will gladly give whatever is asked for  
 To the good we will gladly hand over the cloth-strip on our ass.  
 To the wicked we will give a lathi-stroke on the forehead.  
 We are more loving than even the parents  
 but if need be, more destructive than the enemy.  
 Nectar is no sweeter than what we are  
 Nor can poison be more bitter than what we are  
 Tuka says, We will be indulgent to all according to their desires.

Tr. by M. D. Hatkanangalekar

*iii*

I drink the *rasa* and share it with others  
 Accept it and do not stray into wilderness  
 Lord Vitthala who stands on bricks  
 is the only generous donor  
 If your faith remains steady at his feet  
 He will carry to fruition all your aims

Tuka says, God has sent me down  
To propagate the safe, easy path of bhakti.

*Tr.* by M. D. Hatkanangalekar

*iv*

The Vaishnava's religion is the universe charged with Vishnu  
It is inauspicious to believe in distinctions  
Listen, you are the true devotees of God  
Whatever you do, let it be good and truthful  
Let there be no jealousy of any being  
This is the essence of devotion to all-pervasive God  
Tuka says, All are part of one body  
The universal soul experiences both pleasure and pain.

*Tr.* by M. D. Hatkanangalekar

*v*

The creeper of Hari's name has expanded  
and is laden with flowers and fruits.  
Go there, my mind, like a homing bird  
and satisfy your inmost desires.  
Sweetness present in the original seed has been shown.  
Earn the satisfaction of attaining it.  
Time is on the run, says Tuka,  
Make haste or the fruits will be missed.

*Tr.* by M. D. Hatkanangalekar

*vi*

"Hands are engaged in holding the shield and the sword,  
how should I fight?  
Says the fighter, "the belt, the armour and the headgear  
have become a burden.  
They have made me sit on the horse, how can I run here and there"  
He considers the very remedy to be an obstacle

Tuka says, He himself is the Brahma  
And ignorant as he is, little understands  
The secret of surrendering at the feet of saints.

*Tr. by M. D. Hatkanangalekar*

*vii*

A dog is saffron-coloured; but it is not his natural appearance,  
It has no connection with experience or sect  
A man growing matted hair, wanders in all directions  
But this is how the jackal is clad naturally  
Some people dig up the earth, and stay inside  
What else do the rats do?  
Tuka says, Why behave in this fashion?  
Why inflict pains on the body unnecessarily.

*Tr. by M. D. Hatkanangalekar*

*viii*

The mark of a holy person is that  
he holds dear to him.  
all those who are in misery and pain.  
Know that God is in him  
The mind of a truly good person is soft as butter inside out.  
One who holds to his bosom  
The lame and the weak  
is as kind to servants and maids as to his son—  
Tuka says, Only such a person is the embodiment of God.

*Tr. by M. D. Hatkanangalekar*

*10*

The Moral Ideal

*i*

One who acquires wealth in the right way  
and spends it with a detached mind  
he will reach heaven after death and enjoy all the finest forms of life.

He also never blames others, looks upon other women as  
 his sisters and mothers, cares for the animals as  
 God's creatures, gives water to the thirsty in the forest,  
 loves peace and thinks ill of none,  
 adds to the fame of his forefathers—  
 Such a person attains, says Tuka,  
 the final fulfilment of life  
 and the finest reward of renunciation.

*Tr.* by M. D. Hatkanangalekar

*ii*

Merit consists in service to others,  
 sin is injury done to them;  
 there is no other way to gain anything.  
 Truth is the true religion;  
 observances are false,  
 there is no other secret than this.  
 Salvation consists in uttering his name;  
 destruction in turning away from it.  
 The society of the saints is paradise,  
 the heedless and wanton man is hell himself.  
 Tuka says, Our own gain and destruction lie clear before us;  
 let each do as he chooses.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

*iii*

If you treat another man's wife as your mother,  
 what does it cost you?  
 If you are not fault-finding and covetous,  
 what does it cost you?  
 If you sit still and call on the name of Rama,  
 does it bring any vexation?  
 If you trust in the words of the saints,  
 what does it cost you?  
 Is it any burden to speak the truth—  
 does it cost you anything?  
 Tuka says, The reward of these things is God.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

*iv*

If one is to achieve the end,  
there are two means of attaining it.  
Hold in abhorrence the money and wives of others  
If virtues sent of God visit your house,  
let that be all your wealth.  
Tuka says, Then your body and your house are God's temple.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

*v*

A good seed brings forth sweet and excellent fruit;  
let our mouth be filled with words of divine sweetness;  
let our body be employed on useful purposes.  
Whosoever is pure in every way and has a spirit like the water of the  
Ganges.  
Tuka says, The sight of him drives away  
trouble and brings peace.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

*vi*

The sandal tree is sandal in every limb;  
the philosopher's stone is not void of power in any of its parts.  
There is no darkness in a flame within or without;  
sugar is sweet in every particle.  
Tuka says, Even so in a good man  
no evil quality can be discerned.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

*vii*

Humility is a good thing,  
O God; it avoids all enmity;  
in a great flood the trees perish,  
the blades of grass survive. When the waves pass over them.  
they escape because they are humble.  
Tuka says, The secret is to clasp his feet;  
no violence can harm you.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

## 11

Devotion Described under the Image of  
Woman Addressing Her Paramour

*i*

My first husband disappointed my passion,  
So I have turned my hopes to adultery;  
I need him near me night and day  
I have not a moment of pleasure apart from him.  
Forget me and my affairs and my estate.  
Tuka say, I have passionately desired the infinite one.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

*ii*

This is still my practice;  
I shall not quit it; I have sat down near Govinda.  
I have forcibly entered my new home and made myself queen,  
I have chosen for myself dark-blue Brahma.  
I have enjoyed intercourse with the mighty one, says Tuka,  
now I have neither fear nor care.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

*iii*

I have forgotten my family and my duties,  
my husband, my relatives, the comfort of my home.  
I have forgotten honour and shame along with fear and apprehension;  
My soul is enamoured of the infinite one.  
Tuka says, Now who will tempt me back?  
I have become deaf to everything.

*Tr.* by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

*iv*

Listen to my words;  
dance not the dance that I dance;

as long as you desire what lies behind you,  
do not give up the world.  
Tuka says, What is the use of hypocrisy!  
you will have neither your husband nor Govinda.

*Tuka Mhane*, 17th century

Tr. by Nelson Frazer and K. B. Marathe

## Selections

### BAHINABAI

BAHINABAI (Bahinābāī, 17th century) was a writer of insight and intensity.

#### 1

### Bahina Bai's Life and Thinking

#### i

### Bahinabai Reviews Her Life

#### 1

Devgav was my beautiful parental home. We belonged to the Vajesani branch and the Maunas *Gotra*.

#### 2

In this family I received my body through birth in order that I might live the life of a woman.

#### 3

In that family there was no direct line of *gurus*, and therefore, there was nothing to be listened to with special respect.

#### 4

Says, Bahini, "The laws of the birth are secret,  
known only to God."



1

Girls of the neighbourhood used to come and play with toys.  
While I was thinking of repeating God's names.

2

I did not enjoy childish plays. I do not know how, but a strong  
faith early manifested itself.

3

I did not enjoy the games of *phugadi*, or of *tipari*. I felt I wanted  
my mind fixed (on God).

4

Says Bahini, "Whatever in a former birth was fated to be in this,  
manifested itself in the events of my daily life." (56)

1

My mother and father brought about my marriage. They gave me  
to one who belonged to the Gautam *Gotra*.

2

The marriage festivities lasted four days. I did not know what else  
God proposed for me.

3

My father and mother were distressed by poverty, and they  
were depressed by their other troubles.

4

We left that part of the country, because of (the quarrel) over family  
property, and in our journey crossed both banks of the Ganga (Godavari)

5

My *swami* (husband) was taken along with us. We arrived at  
length at the Mahadeva forest in a distant province.

6

Says Bahini, "Father, mother, brother and husband and myself arriving there, we experienced a sense of rest." (57)

1

From the Mahadeva forest we journeyed to Pandharpur.  
Here we experienced joy in meeting with the saints.

2

This meeting with the saints was a happier thing to me than life itself.  
But I was in constant terror of my husband.

3

I had heard of the anger of Jamadagni. My husband showed  
the same characteristic in his dealings with people.

4

Says Bahini, "I was now eleven years of age, but I had not had one  
moment's joy." (58)

1

My swami (husband) for his livelihood was a *Vaidik* (reciter of  
the Vedas) by profession. What use had he for God!

2

He used to repeat parts of the Vedas, but had no love for *bhakti* (worship  
and love of God). I had no independence and my wishes had no effect.

3

I was young in years, but the popular ways seemed silly. Out of  
respect for the Vedas, I stood ready to serve.

4

Says Bahini, "I was very depressed in spirits. My daily life was  
full of troubles." (59)

*ii***Bahini's Depression**

1

Possessing a woman's body and myself being subject to others,  
I was not able to carry out my desire to discard all worldly things.

2

And yet a change took place through the power of right-thinking.  
What a wonderful thing God worked!

3

I suffered in body from the three kinds of affliction, and I was  
tempted to commit suicide.

4

There was not the slightest worship of God (Hari) (in our family).  
Both enemy and dear friends were all for worldly things.

5

I considered bodily enjoyments as enemies. Who was there now  
to concern himself with me?

6

Says Bahini, "As vomited vomit, so my mind began to regard the  
illusions of this life." (60)

1

As a deer that finds itself in a net or as a blind man lost in a forest.

2

So it happened to me. Whom shall I seek for my welfare? My  
soul was in distress.

3

As a fish out of water, as a calf without its mother, as a deer without  
her young one, so was I.

4

Says Bahini, "O God, in this distress of mine, look on me with the eye of mercy." (61)

1

The root of *vairagya* (indifference to worldly things) is the putting away of worldly cares. When viewed aright, a house and a mountain are the same (in essence).

2

Distress has come upon me. (O God), quickly run to my help! Enlighten my soul through the means of Right-thinking (*Viveka*).

3

To leave a husband is against the teachings of the Vedas, and thereby one can never acquire the supreme spiritual riches.

4

At my door there seemed a great serpent hissing at me. How could I live under such conditions?

5

It is the teaching of the *Vedas*, that one should not neglect one's duty, but my love was for the worship of God (Hari).

6

Says Bahini, "I was in a sea of troubles. How can I describe the increasing anguish of my heart!" (62)

1

The *Vedas* cry aloud, and the *Purans* shout that no good comes of a woman.

2

Now I in the natural way have a woman's body. What means then have I to acquire the supreme spiritual riches (*Paramartha*)?

3

The characteristics (of a woman) are foolishness, selfishness, seductiveness, and deception. All connection with a woman is disastrous. (Such is their opinion).

4

Says Bahini, "If a woman's body brings disaster, what chance is there for her to acquire in this life the supreme spiritual riches?" (63)

1

I wonder what sin I committed in a former birth that in this birth I should be so separated from God?

2

I am born with a human body, but in the form of a woman. It is evident that the innumerable sins (of my former birth) have now come to their fruitage.

3

(As a woman) I have no right to listen to the reading of the *Vedas*. The Brahmins have made a secret of the *Gayatri mantra*.

4

I am told I must not pronounce the sacred word "Om". I must not listen to philosophical ideas.

5

I must not speak to any one about them. My husband was Jamadagni himself (if I did those things).

6

Says Bahini, "My soul is very downcast. God has no compassion on me." (64)

1

In our home the name of God was like a defiled thing.  
The *Bhagavadgita* and *Shastras* were considered as enemies in our family.

2

No one cared for God, for sacred bathing places, for pilgrimages for Hari himself. It was into such a home that I was given in marriage.

3

They did not like the communication of saints, nor the *bhakti* of Rama. They did not like the *Vedas* nor the *Shastras* nor the (Puranic) stories (Of the gods and heroes).

4

Says Bahini, "May the multitude of my sins be removed, and my heart find peace." (65)

*iii*

### Bahini Contemplates Suicide

1

My heart has passed through the intense heat of repentance. How is it that God does not feel compassion for me?

2

I feel like throwing myself into the fire, or using this saw to sever my head.

3

I feel like throwing myself into the flowing river, or flying to some distant spot.

4

I feel like going into the jungle, there to sit until I gain my desire, and fast until I go.

5

Says Bahini, "My soul is in a confused state. O God (Vanamali), why have you forsaken me!" (66)

1

You are causing this irritation by the hand of my husband, but my soul has made it determination.

2

I will not leave the worship of God, even if it should mean the losing of my life.

3

You are seeking to test me? For through my husband my body is being destroyed.

4

What am I to do? I am in the midst of hardship. I have no desires for my body.

5

Let it fall in death but O, may my longing remain to see the Infinite one with the eye of spiritual knowledge.

6

I want to render you worship, I want to fulfill all my special duties, and through the means of spiritual knowledge recognize you.

7

Will this body of mine endure for long these distressing experiences? Why do you not listen to my cry?

8

I have heard that the teaching of the *Vedas*, is, that, if a desire remains unfulfilled (in one life), a rebirth takes place.

9

Now in this time of distress if I commit suicide, the fault will be on your head. So protect your child.

10

Says Bahini, "O Protector of the universe ! Why have you become deaf and blind?" (67)

*iv*

### God is Bahini's Refuge

1

Yet, O God (Hari), you alone are my friend, my very own Brother, and the advocate of the lowly in heart, O Pandurang.

2

In worshipping you I can still be true to my duty of devotion to my husband. You , O God must thus think also.

3

The supreme spiritual riches are surely not contrary to the *Vedas*. Therefore, think of this purpose of mine.

4

Says Bahini, "O God, think at once of my longing, by which I can accomplish both." (68)

1

My mother, father and brother made themselves the friends of worldly things, and therefore were very grieved at my condition.

2

I could tell this to, God, O You who know my heart ! There is no one else to tell it to.

3

And there is no one to counsel me as to what I should do for my good. The neighbourhood is not made up of good men.



4

I am entirely alone in a forest. I have lost recollection of even hunger and thirst.

5

I do not feel like talking to anyone of this. O God (Keshav) ! You must think of this.

6

Says Bahini, "I know your name only. Who is there to whom I could tell more (of my sad tale), O God (Hari)?" (69)

1

My soul has suffered intense anguish. I am supremely miserable, O my friend.

2

I have attempted to comfort myself by this one thought that all this suffering has come because of deeds done in a former birth.

3

Even Brahmadeva and the other gods cannot escape the same law, how much less those of humble estate !

4

Says Bahini, "It is my fate to have to suffer. What can even God (Govinda) do to help me?" (70)

1

My body is responsible for my joys and woes. It is necessary that I suffer them.

2

But if this suffering means the putting far away of sin, I count it as a welcome good,

3

I wish the longing of my heart to express itself in singing God's  
praise, even while my body is suffering torture.

4

Says Bahini, "I suffer what is my Fate. Who is there on whom  
I can lay the blame?" (71)

1

The course of Fate cannot ever be avoided, why then be  
vainly troubled thereby ?

2

My heart has made its firm resolve. Now (it is your opportunity)  
O God (Chakrapani), Pandurang.

3

No one can deliver me from my bodily suffering.  
O God I know this !

4

Says Bahini, "I am now going to plead with God. Do not put me  
to a severe test, O Hari !" (72)

v

### Bahini's Dark Clouds Disappear

1

Fate's cord around me has at last been broken! My soul has become  
purified.

2

God has shown me his mercy that on the banks of the Indrayani river,  
in this humble village of Dehu, there is a royal path to *bhakti*.

3

Here there is a temple to God Pandurang. (In its pilgrim quarters)  
we were given a place to lodge in.

4

Always there were three things before my eyes, Tukaram, the saints,  
and the *kirtans*.

5

I could not make him a *namaskar*, for fear of my husband. But my  
mind was ever at his feet.

6

Says Bahini, "Seven months passed in this way. We experienced  
all that Fate had for us." (73)

1

Our pilgrim quarters in the temple became a place of joy. I felt  
like sitting there.

2

In contemplation, to meditate with closed eyes, and bring God  
to my remembrance.

3

As I saw Tukaram (in my imagination) he appeared to come to me  
in the form of Death.

4

Says Bahini, "I obtained from my mother permission to remain  
there three nights." (74)

1

I did not know the proper *mantras* to repeat, nor the proper *rites* to  
perform. I did not know the right austerities, nor how to arrange  
the seat appropriate to meditation.

2

I had not been enlightened as to the method of contemplation,  
nor how to control my senses.

3

But I had before me the stone image of Vithoba for my contemplation,  
and in my heart God (Ramchandra).

4

It was the longing of my heart to hold a service (katha) in praise of  
Tukaram.

5

When I heard the sound of the cymbals and the *chipali*, my heart  
could not contain itself for joy.

6

With closed eyes, both in sleep and in waking state, I saw  
the form of Tukaram.

7

He placed his hand on my head, and in spoken words gave me  
the promise of poetic powers.

8

Says Bahini, "I do not know whether this was in a dream or in my  
waking state, but my senses ceased their action." (75)

1

In my joy my senses were overcome with emotion. My mind  
contemplated Tukaram's feet.

2

When I awoke out of this state and I recollected the *mantra* of  
six letters (which he had whispered in my ear),

3

I fastened it in my memory. I remembered nothing else.

4

Says Bahini. "He placed his hands on my head, but  
I was not to see his body in this world." (76)

1

My joy was so great that I was driven to silence.  
In knowing that state,  
blessed will be *gurus* and *bhaktas*.

2

All my senses felt the joy. I was sitting beside God.

3

It was with me just as if a jar is dipped into a pool of deep water.  
Without breaking it is filled completely with water.

4

Says Bahini, "So it was with my heart. And Tukaram recognized it  
by its signs." (77)

1

I felt that I did not wish to be aroused out of my  
state of contemplation, even if it meant death not to do so.  
For my soul was rocking with joy.

2

With my mind intensely happy I went to the Indrayani river.

3

I looked upon the image of Pandurang when suddenly I felt inspired  
to be a poetess.

4

I made a *namaskar* there to Tukaram, and quickly came back to where we lodged.

5

Says Bahini "(This inspiration to poesy) came like the tide of the ocean, or like the words of the God of Thunder (Indra) in the sky of my heart." (78)

From *Bahina Bai*, 17th century

Tr. by Justin E. Abbott

2

### The Building of the Bhakti Cult

1

The saints have shown their merciful favour. The building has arrived at its completion.

2

Jnanadeva laid the foundation, and erected the temple.

3

His servant, Namdeva, built the wall surrounding it.

4

Eknath, the disciple of Janardan, erected its pillar in the form of his commentary on the Bhagavata Purana.

5

Tukaram became its pinnacle. Now then worship in this temple at your leisure.

6

Says Bahini, "The flag above it flutters in the wind. I have clearly described this temple."

*Abhang Imarat Phala Ali*, 17th century

Tr. by Chandrashekhar Jahagirdar

## King Shivaji's Letters

SHIVAJI

Here are two letters written by the king SHIVAJI (1630-1680), the first to his military officers and the second to his brother Vyankoji (i.e. Ekoji). They are specimens of letter-writing in the 17th century. These letters are historically important as they reveal Shivaji's qualities such as his strict discipline, his concern for the well-being of ordinary farmers and the people in general, his political sagacity and his worldly wisdom.

### 1

#### Shivaji's Letter to His Military Officers

(*Rajwade*, Vol. VIII, No. 28)

From Shivaji Raje;

To The Jumledars, Havalgars, and Karkuns in charge of the horse at Halvarna, taluka Chiplun, district Dabhol.

Suhur 1074. The Saheb posted the cavalry in the Subdivision of Chiplun, and the circumstances were not such that the force could go upcountry after this. So they were sent into cantonment. Now as the troops remained at Chiplun, much of the supplies and provisions and other things which had been stored for the horse, for use during the rainy season, in the district of Dabhol, was exhausted. And the requirements of the army in grass and many other miscellaneous articles had to be raised from the country round about Chiplun. So nothing remains there now. Then again, the horses have to remain inactive for twenty days in this hot season, in Vaishakh. But as it was necessary, whatever supplies there were at the different forts have been taken from the karkuns, and thus provision made for the horse. Now, you will ask for any amount of rations of grain and grass, feed recklessly while the supplies remain; and when these are exhausted, during the height of the rainy season, you will get nothing; you will have to starve, and the horse will begin to die. That will mean that you will have killed the horses. Then you will begin to trouble the country. For instance, you will go, and some will take the grain of the cultivators, some bread, some grass, some wood, some vegetables, and things. When you begin to act like that, the poor peasants, who are holding on to their cottages and somehow eking out a livelihood, will themselves begin to run away. Some of them will starve. Then they will think that you are worse than the Moghuls who overrun the country-side! Such agony there will be! Then all the curses of the peasants and the horses will descend on you. Know this well, and whether you are a

Sipahi or a foot-soldier, lay this to your hearts, and behave yourselves. Some of you may be staying in different villages, in connection with the government stables or otherwise; they have no business to trouble the rayats in any way whatever-no business to step outside the place where they stay. The Saheb has given them their due shares from the treasury. Whatever anyone wants, whether it be grain, or grass for any cattle that you may be having, or fuel, or vegetables, or anything else, he should duly buy it if it comes round to be sold; or go to the bazar, and buy it duly there. There is no need to force anybody, or to tyrannise over anybody, or to quarrel with anybody. Again, the provisions, which have been assigned to the government stables, must last through the rainy season. The karkuns will give rations of grain with an eye to this; you must take only that much, so that you will never be reduced to going without food, there will be something to eat every day, and the horses will gradually gain strength. Do this; no need to lose temper with the karkun for nothing, or to say 'Give me this ; or 'give me that,' or violently to enter the store-room and seize things in it. Again, the men attached to the stables are probably living, and will live, in single rooms; some of them will make fires, some will make their *chullas* and cook in unsuitable places; some will take live coals to light their pipes with, without minding whether there is any grass lying about, or whether there is a breeze. Thus suddenly they will catch it and will be burnt down. If some spark falls from somewhere on a few blades of grass, all the grass will begin to burn. Then even if the heads of the peasants are cut off, or proper punishment is dealt to karkuns, this will not bring one piece of wood to build a room with, and not a single room will be built. This is plain to everybody. Therefore, let due warning be given, and let the officers go round always and see that there is no cooking or lighting of fires (at unsuitable places), or that a lamp is not kept burning at night, so that a mouse can come and take the burning wick with it. Let there be no accident from fire. See that the grass, the rooms, are safe. Then the horses will outlive the rainy season. In the other case it will not be necessary to tie the horses, not necessary to feed them, the establishment itself will be no more! And you will be free from all care! Therefore it is that I have written to you in so much detail. All the officers-Jumledars, and Havalgars and Karkuns-that there are, should hear this letter in every detail and act up to it. We shall keep ourselves informed frequently, even every day, and deal out punishment (where necessary). He who will not behave according to this, who will behave wrongly, who will be found to blame, will, if he is Maratha, not only lose his place, but be dishonoured; if a low-caste person suffer still greater punishment . . . . . 12 Safar.<sup>1</sup>



## 2

## Shivaji's Letter to Vyankoji

Blessing of Shivaji Raje to Ekoji Raje. Know that all is well with us here, and pray write the same to us about yourself. It is now thirteen years since the late Saheb (Shahaji) died. Raghunathpant then placed you on the throne and gave the whole kingdom into your hands--the Maharaja's treasure, jewels, elephants, horses, territory, and everything. So for thirteen years you yourself enjoyed the half which was my share. As for demanding that share from you, I was far away. I waited for thirteen years because I knew that you are not a man to yield it without making trouble. I thought to myself, "Well, he too is the Maharaja's son. Let him enjoy it as long as he does. He too is after all a rightful master of the thing. When it is convenient I shall put forward my claim and take it." This was all the while in my mind. Then I came to Bhaganagar to see the Kutubshah on some diplomatic business; thence I went into the Karnataka and came to Chandi. I took Chandi and the territory about Vellore, defeated Sherkhan in a battle and destroyed him. I took all the territory which was in Sherkhan's hands. Then by several marches I came to the bank of the Kaveri. From there I wrote letters to you, asking you in many ways to stand to me such able men as Govindbhat Gosavi, and Kakajipant, and Niloba Naik, and Rangoba Naik, and Timaji Yakshiyarrao. Accordingly you sent these men to us. In various ways I urged my claim in a friendly manner before these men and sent them with the message that the half of my share should be handed over to me without making any trouble. With them I sent also three good men from my side, viz., Balambhat Gosavi and Krishna Jotisi and Krishnaji Sekhji. These good men saw you and advised you variously not to create discord within the family, and to hand over to me the half of my share which I had been demanding. But you planned this deception in your mind: "I have now become a great chief. I shall go and see him personally, and carry myself very humbly before him, and then withhold his share." You enjoyed the whole principality for thirteen years. You conceived the idea of continuing to enjoy the whole of it in future also, and so, without making any settlement about the share, you came to see me personally. Then we two met each other. Then in many ways did I say to you, "Give me my share." But you would not even entertain the thought of yielding it. Then it became necessary (to take harsh measures). But that you, being a younger brother, should of yourself come to see me, and that I should then seize you and demand my share--this was not a thing befitting my position and reputation. So I gave you leave to go to Tanjore. You went to Tanjore. Thereupon I thought,

"It is not good to promote internal discord; by doing that, of old, the Pandavas and the Kauravas came to much grief"; remembering that whole story of the Mahabharata, and knowing well that internal discord would lead both parties to grief, I again told you in various ways through Shamji Naik, and Konheripant, and Shivaji Shankar: "Let us make a division and take our respective shares, and live with goodwill towards each other." But you, like Duryodhana, intended evil, and were determined not to come to any arrangement, but to fight. Then I had some urgent business on the Raigad side; so I left Santaji Raje, and Raghunathpant and Hambirao there and myself rode off to Torgal. There I received the news, that listening to the advice of the Mussalmans, and thinking of fighting with my men, you had collected all your troops, and sent them against my men; that they came to Walgondpur; that on their advance, there was a stubborn fight between your men and mine; that your men were defeated, Pratapji Raje, Bhivji Raje, and Shivaji Dabir were made prisoners, several killed, and a great many put to a precipitate flight. Such was the news I received. When I heard it I thought it strange that you, being the son of the late Maharaja, and a person of note, should yet not think at all of what you do, or have any consideration of right and wrong. That being so, what wonder if you come to grief? You will ask, "What was I to think?" Well, you ought to have thought, "If for thirteen years I unjustly enjoyed the whole principality, what is done is done; now he demands his share; it is right I gave it to him, and lived happily myself." You ought to have thought like that. Secondly, you ought to have thought, "He has won the full favour of the gods. He destroys the wicked Turks. When my army is full of Turks what hope can I have of victory, and the Turks of surviving?" This also you ought to have thought, and you ought to have stopped short of the step of going to war. But you thought in the same way as Duryodhana, made war, and caused many men to be slain. Well, what is done is done. For the future at least do not be obstinate. If for thirteen years you enjoyed the whole principality, that is now past. Now, some places I have already taken. Others which are still in your hands, - viz., Arni, Bangalore, Kolar, Hoskot, Siralkot, and other minor places, and Tanjore, should be handed over to our men; and of the cash, jewellery, elephants, and horses, half should be given to me as my share. You will mind, I shall give you a jagir of 3 lakhs of hons in the district of Panhala, this side of the Tungabhadra, to be held under myself. Or if you do not like to hold a jagir under me, I shall make an application to the Kutubshah and procure for you a jagir of three lakhs under him. Both alternatives I have suggested to you. One of them you should consider and accept. Do not leave it to be decided by obstinacy. There is no reason why we should quarrel between ourselves and come to grief. Now at least resolve

that there should be a peaceful arrangement between us, and settle this business of the shares, and live happily. Family discord is not a good thing. I have been telling you so up to now, as becomes an elder person, and I tell you so now. If you listen to it, well and good; you will be happy; if you do not listen, the repentance will be yours only. How can I help it?"

*Marath Vanchya Itihasaachi Sadhane*, 17th century      Tr. by R.P. Patwardhan  
and H.G. Rawlinson

## The Jedhe Chronology

ANONYMOUS

It was customary in old times for every well-to-do family to keep a chronological record of events of public importance supplemented by details regarding its own members. *The Jedhe Chronology* is one of such important records, kept by the Jedhes, Deshmukhs of Kari near Bhor, south of Pune. *The Jedhe Chronology* records events with dates covering the period 1618-1697. The portion of the chronology recording events up to September 1659 has been taken here.

Shaka 1540 Kalayukta (17th March 1618-6th March 1619) Kartik Vadya I (Saturday, 24th October 1618)-Birth of Aurangzib.

1546 Raktakshi (10th March 1624-26th February 1625) Kartik (3rd-31st October 1624)- Malik Ambar defeated the combined armies of the Moghul Subhedar Lashkar Khan and the Adilshahi Mulla Mohammad at Bhatavdi. Malik Ambar besieged and took Sholapur from the Bijapur king.

1547 Krodhana (27th February 1625-17th March 1626) - Sultan Khurram, son of the Emperor Jahangir, got angry with the latter and went into Nizamshahi territory; Malik Ambar gave him shelter in the Nizamshahi kingdom.

1548 Kshaya (18th March 1626-7th March 1627) Vaishakh (17th April-15th May 1626) - Death of Malik Ambar.

1550 Vibhava (26th March 1628-14th March 1629) - Sultan Khurram became Emperor of Delhi under the title of Shah Jehan.

Kartik Krishna 5, Thursday (6th November 1628) — Kanhoji Naik Jedhe's first wife, Savitribai, daughter of Pasalkar, gave birth to a son Baji Naik.

1551 Shukla —

Phalgun Vadya 3, Friday (19th February 1630) — Constellation Hasta, Shivaji Raje was born at Shivneri, at Ghati 18, Pal 31

Gad 5, Pal 7. Shravan 15 (25th July 1629) - Lukhji Jadhavrao was murdered by Nizamshah. Chaitra (15th March-13th April 1629) - Ibrahim Adilshah having died and Sulan (sic) Muhammadshah having sat on the throne, Khawaskhan became the Vazir and Murar Jagderao the Karbhari.

1552 Pramoda (4th March 1630-22nd March 1631)-There was a famine this year.

Pausha Vadya II (18th January 1631)-Fateh Khan was released and admitted to the court.

1553 Prajapati (23rd March 1631-10th March 1632)-Fateh Khan murdered Burhan Nizamshah.

1554 Angira —

Jyeshtha (10th May-7th June 1632)-Kazi Mahabatkhan captured Daulatabad siege. Bhadrapad (6th August-4th September 1632)-Shahaji crowned Nizamshah at Pemgiri.

1557 Yuva (9th March 1635-26th March 1636)-Shahaji went to Mahuli, where he was besieged by Randullakhan Adilshahi and Khan Zeman, the Moghul Subhedar. They captured Nizamshah. Shahaji entered Adilshahi service. Randullakhan had taken Kanhoji Jedhe with him at that time: he met the Maharaj (i.e., Shahaji) there.

1558 Dhata to 1561 Pramathi (27th March 1636-12th March 1640)-Basavapattan was captured by Adilshah.

1565 Subhan (11th March 1643-27th February 1644)- Birth of Bahadurshah; he was given the title of Shah Alam.

1570 Sarvadhari-

Shravan Vadya I (25th July 1648)-Shahaji was arrested by Mustafakhan near Chandi. With him were Kanhoji Naik Jedhe and Dadaji Krishna; they were sent captives to Kanakgiri; then Dadajipant's son, Ratnajipant, died at Kanakgiri.

1571 Virodhi —

Jyeshtha Shuddha (16th May 1649)-Shahaji was released in return for Kondhana. At the same time Kanhoji Naik Jedhe and Dadaji Krishna Lohokare were released. They met the Maharaj. Then said the Maharaj: "You have been put to the hardships of captivity on my account. Now, it has been settled between the Padshah and myself that I should have a territory of twelve gavs and carry an expedition into the Karnatak according to his orders; accordingly the province of Bangalore,

yielding 5 lacs of hons, has been given to me in jagir. So I have to go on the Karnatak expedition. You have your watan in the Mawal, and my son Shivba occupies Khedebare and Poona. You should be by his side in force; you wield great power in that region; you should remain there in force and see that all the Mawal Deshmukhs submit to him and obey him and should keep loyal and fight it." To this effect did Shahaji take an oath from him, and also an oath of loyalty making him place his hands on bread and Bel leaves; and he too in turn took a similar oath to Kanhoji, and presenting Kanhoji Naik and Shivaji with letters and a trusted attendant of his own.

1576 Jay (9th March 1654-27th March 1655) – A son, named Umaji, was born to Sambhaji; he was born on Kartik Vadya 12 (25th November 1654).

1577 Manmatha —

On Pausa 14 (either 31st December 1655 or 15th January 1656)- Shivaji went and captured Javli; at that time he took with himself the contingents of Kanhoji Jedhe Deshmukh and Bandal and Silimkar, and also that of the Deshmukhs of Mawal, and the fought with th help of these forces and took Javli.

1578 Durmukh —

Vaishakh (15th April-14th May 1656) – Shivaji took Rairee; with him were Kanhoji Jedhe, Deshmukh of Bhor, and the Bandal and the Silimkar Deshmukhs, and the forces of Mawal; Haibatrao and Balaji Naik Silimkar mediated and Chandrarao got down from the fort; thereupon Shivaji gave a fresh seal (i.e., issued a fresh Sanad) to Haibatrao Silimkar and made a division (of the property) between the two brothers.

Margashirsha (7th November-5th December 1656) – Sultan Muhammad Adilshah died.

Ashwin Vadya (24th September-7th October 1656) – The King took Supa and arrested Sambhaji Mohite.

Magh Shuddha (5th January-19th January 1657) – Shivaji married Sakwarbai of the Gaikwad family.

1579 Hemalambi —

On Chaitra Vadya II, Sunday (29th or 30th March 1657) 8 ghatish-Aurangzib arrived at Bidar, having resolved to take it from Adilshah; on Thursday Ashadh Shuddha 3 (4th June 1657) he took it.

Vaishakh Shuddha 5 (8th April 1657)- A marriage connection effected with Jadhavrao.

Jyeshtha (4th May-1st June 1657)- Shivaji fought with Nausirkhan at Ahmednagar.

Kartik Shuddha 15 (10th or 11th November 1657) - The Badi Sahibin murdered Khan Muhammad.

Pausha (25th December 1657-23rd January 1658)- Aurangzib marched to Delhi.

Vaishakh Shuddha 12 (15th April 1657)- A marriage connection was affected with the Ingle family.

Vaishakh (4th April-3rd May 1657)- Junnar was plundered.

Jyeshtha Shuddha 12 (14th May 1657)-A son, Sambhaji, was born to Shivaji; he was born to Shivaji; he was born at Purandhar.

Ashwin Vadya 12 (24th October 1657)- Kalyan Bhiwandi was taken by the Raja (Shivaji). Then a force of cavalry and foot soldiers was sent under Dadaji Bapuji as Subha. At the same time Shivaji obtained from Kanhoji Naik Jedhe the services of Dadaji Krishna Lohokare and his brother Sakho Krishna Lohokare, and appointed them to the charge of Kalyan and Bhivandi respectively. Dadaji Krishna had his cousin Yesiji Gopnath substituted to the duties he was performing for Kanhoji Naik Jedhe.

1580 Vilambi —

Pausha (15th December 1658-12th January 1659)- Fateh Khan was killed at Bijapur by poisoning.

Shravan (21st July-18th August 1658)- Bahlol Khan was killed.

Bhadrapad Shuddha 13 (30th August 1658)- Sonajipant was given a dress of honour and sent to Delhi.

1581 Vikari (13th March 1659-1st March 1660)- Aurangzib ascended the throne.

Vaishakh (12th April-11th May 1659)- A *Firman* came from the Adilshah to the Deshmukhs of the Mawal to join Afzalkhan. Now Kedarji Khopde was with Afzalkhan already. Khandoji, son of Dharmoji Khopde, Deshmukh of Utroli, went to Afzalkhan.

Along with the other Deshmukhs of Mawal, Kanhoji Naik Jedhe had received a *Firman*; with it and with his five sons Kanhoji went to Rajgad to see Shivaji. He showed the *Firman*

to the latter. Then Shivaji said, "Your neighbours, Kedarji and Khandoji Khopde, Deshmukhs of Utroli, have gone to Afzalkhan; if you stay, and do not obey the king's order, your *watan* will be in danger; it is a difficult situation, and a matter of life and death; so you also should go." To this Kanhoji Naik replied "The Maharaj (i.e., Shahaji) has given me into your hands after taking an oath from me; that oath and that loyalty still remain; my *watan* I have placed at your feet; I and my sons are prepared to lose our lives for your sake. So let come what may." So saying, he took an oath. Shivaji asked him to pour water down the hand in renunciation of the *watan*. He did accordingly. Then Shivaji said "Your family are at Kari; you should take them to Talegaon." Then he called back Dadaji Krishna, who had charge of Kalyan, and Kanhoji Naik kept with himself his eldest son Rakhmaji Dadaji, and took his own *family*, as well as that of Dadajipant, to Talegaon of the Dhamdharas; in accordance with Shivaji's order. Shivaji and Kanhoji Naik exchanged oaths on bread and bel. Then Kanhoji called together the men of Bandal, and also Haibatrao Silimkar, and Pasalkar, and Marne, and Dhamale, and Maral, and Dohar, took oaths from them in private, and prepared a considerable army. Then Shivaji sent Pantaji Gopinath as envoy to Afzalkhan and arranged a visit at the foot of Pratapgad.

Shravan Shuddha 2 (11th July 1659)--Shivaji came to Javli.

Bhadrpad Vadya 14 (5th September 1659)--Shivaji's wife, Saibai, died.

*Jedhe Shakavali*, 17th century Tr. by R.P. Patwardhan and H.G. Rawlinson

## Shivaji Goes to Agra and Returns

DRISHANJI ANANT SABHASAD

The following is an extract from the chronicle *Shivaji Raje Vanchi Bakhar* (Sivaji Raje Vānci Bakhar) by DRISHANJI ANANT SABHASAD (17th century).

The Raje sent a petition to the Emperor (with the message) "I am coming for an interview." He wrote and sent a letter to this effect. After this the Raje went, in the company of the Mirza Raja, with his own forces towards Bijapur. On the march, the Mirza Raja and Shivaji Raje sat in the

same *howda*, and proceeded (on their journey). All the *wazirs* used to come and salute them. Dilel Khan would not salute. The reason was, that the Raje and he (Jaya Sing) were at the same place (together on the same seat); how then could he salute ? On this ground he would not salute. Then peace was made with Bijapur also. Then they were to have gone together to Delhi.

But to this proposal, the Mirza Raja said — "The Badshah is very expert in devices, (and) is faithless. If you and I go together, and (some) treachery is committed against both of us, what should (we) do ? I shall go there afterwards. I shall stay at Aurangabad, — You go to Delhi. My son Ram Sing is at the court. He is also a man of equal weight (with me),.

I am sending (verbal) instructions to him. Get the interview through him. Obtain (the grant) of a *soranjum* and come to the south. After you have started from Delhi I shall go there. Till then I shall remain away. (So that) the Badshah may not commit treachery against you, after you have met him. Giving counsels in this manner, (he) then sent a letter to Ram Sing (and) adjusting (everything) properly, and despatched the Raje. (Following is) the list of the *karkuns* and personal attendants — the Raje took with him.—

Niraji Banji Sahana Trimbakji Sondev, son of Sonaji Pant (item I) Manko Har Sabnis (1) Dattaji Trimbak (1) Hiroji Farzand (1) Raghoji Mitra (1) Davlji Gadge (1).

Mawles (1,000) one thousand, Lashkar (forces — Sawar according to a different readings) 3,000 three thousand, (48) and such like. With these, the Raje came to Rajgad, took leave of all and took with him these two—proceeded to Delhi—stage by stage. The Badshah learning that the Raje was coming for an interview, sent instructions to all his *faujdars* and Mahal Mokasaholders — "Shivaji Raje is coming to pay homage. Wherever he may encamp the *faujdar* of the place should wait on him. (And) supply food and drink as may be necessary. He should be honoured in the same manner as the Shahzadas."

Such orders were sent. Then, (wherever) the Raje broke his journey, the *faujdars* used to meet him there, and supply him with food and drink and what expense was necessary. In this manner, (he) reached Delhi in two months.

The Badshah, learning that the Raje has come, sent Ram Sing forward to receive him, Ram Sing came and met (the Raje). Raghunath Pant Korde, (who) had been previously sent as an envoy, also came and met (the Raje). (He) reported every news about the Badshah. "Outwardly he expressed satisfaction and pleasure, but what is in the Badshah's mind we do not know." So said (Korde). Having interviewed (the Raje) Ram



Sing came to the Badshah (and) reported the news. The Badshah allotted a big independent house in its own garden (*haveli*) and named the place *Shivapura* and there the Raje took up his residence. At an auspicious moment, he set out to see the Badshah. The Badshah assembled his Darbar, sat on the royal throne, keeping five weapons near (him) girding his waist, and putting on a steel armour. Similarly he made great warriors of (known) valour to stand near the throne, and (stationed) two thousand (men) in its neighbourhood. Likewise all the *wazirs* were assembled in readiness, in the Hall of Public Audience. In his mind (the Badshah) argued- "Shivaji is not an ordinary man, he is the Devil. He killed Afzal Khan at (a friendly) interview. What should be done, if in a like manner, he jumps on the throne, and makes a treacherous attack on me?" So thinking, he sat prepared for every contingency (49). (Then) he called the Raje for the interview. Ram Sing conducted the Raje, and his son Sambhaji Raje, and a few men (literally ten men) *karkuns* and near relatives of Raje, to the interview. Nazar was offered to the Badshah. The Badshah said, - "Come! Shivaji Raje!" As soon as he said so, the Raje offered three salutes. In his mind he meant—the first (for) Shri Shambhu Mahadev, the second (for) Shri Bhavani, the third (for) the Maharaja his father; - in this manner were the salutes offered. And the Badshah ordered him to stand on the right side, near (and below) Jasvant Sing Maharaj, the Raja of Navkot of Marvad. The Raje and his son stood (accordingly). (The Raje) asked Ram Sing - "Who is the neighbour in front of us?" Ram Sing answered — "Maharaj Jasvant Sing." On hearing so, the Raje got angry (and said, "An *Ommo* like Jasvant Sing, whose back my soldiers have seen! Why should I stand below him?" Saying so in his anger, he began to beg of Ram Sing (his) dagger, (threatening) to kill the Maharaja with the dagger — that hung by Ram Sing's waist. Then Ram Sing began to counsel him to be patient. When these words were being exchanged, the Badshah became aware (of the tumult). He asked- "What is the matter?" Ram Sing replied- "The tiger is a wild animal of the forests, he feels hot. Something has happened." As he said so, fear grew in the Badshah's mind. There was no knowing what might happen. Therefore the Badshah said to Ram Sing- "Go (back) with the Raje to (his) quarters. To-morrow (we) will have an interview at leisure." As he said so, the Raje, his son, and Ram Sing and the Raje's men, all returned to his quarters. When the Raje was gone, the Badshah felt relieved. "A great evil is over. I and Shivaji have seen each other"- So saying he remained (silent).

After the Raje had returned to his residence, he and Ram Sing sat (together), (and the Raje) said- "Who is the Badshah? I am Shivaji! Am I to be made to stand below Jasvant! (50) The Badshah does not understand anything (of propriety)." So said (he). Ram Sing said, "Do not go to the

interview. As you have come, keep up appearances and (then) go back. It will be a great gain to us, if you can safely go from here." So saying, Ram Sing went to his own *haveli*.

The Raje Summoned his *karkuns*, courtiers, and Raghunath Pant Korde (and) asked (them) — "What step should be taken next? The Emperor's policy is known (to us). How to achieve success in it, (against the policy), secure leave of the Emperor, (and) go hence? The Badshah will not give (us) leave, unless (we) undertake to render some service to him." Then, Raghunath Pant was sent with the (following) instructions - "You should go to the Badshah tomorrow, and petition (him to the following effect). We have no other interest except that of Your Majesty. I have without any suspicion, come with my son also, for an interview. Service should be accepted from (this) servant. I undertake to conquer for His Majesty, the two Badshahis, the whole of the Adilshahi and the whole of the Kutub Shahi, in the south. (The Badshah) should reflect on the services rendered by the other governors (subah) that he sends and my services (in comparison). After making some such professions, (suggest that) if I am called for a private interview in the (private) Council chamber, I shall meet (the Emperor) and communicate something (important). Petition to this effect." So he instructed. Thereupon Raghunath Pant Korde went to the Badshah the next day, wrote the petition as instructed, and submitted it. The Badshah (however) entertained suspicion in his mind after reading the petition. And he wrote on the back of the petition, (as) an answer "Wait, I will do what you have asked for." Such was the answer (he) wrote. He (Raghunath) came, and told the Raje to wait. "Then there is suspicion (in his mind), he has not given a frank answer;" so the Raje inferred. On that very day Shaista Khan sent (the following) verbal message to Jafar Khan the Dewan, -since the reign of the late Badshah he has been Dewan, but the administration was conducted by his deputy, — "Shivaji is intensely perfidious. (He) is learned (in the black arts). (51) When he entered into my camp, he jumped over forty yards and entered into the house; the Badshah should not call such a man to an interview. If he is called, he will make a treacherous attack, jumping over a space of forty or fifty yards." He sent words (to this purport). Thereupon Jafar Khan made this information known to the Badshah. The Badshah offended at heart regarded it as true. (He) entertained strong suspicions in his mind.

The next day the Raje learnt that Jafar Khan, the Dewan, had slandered him before the Badshah. Learning this, he sent Raghunath Pant Korde to Jafar Khan with the message, "I am coming to see you." (With this message) he sent (him). After making deliberations in his mind for a long time, he said, - "All right! Let him come." So the Raje went to see Jafar Khan. (He) honoured him greatly, and spoke something about (his) *saranjam*, but he

did not like it. (Jafar Khan) said outwardly 'very well'. His wife was Shaista Khan's sister, she sent words from the harem, "Shaista Khan's fingers were cut off. Afzal Khan was killed. Shivaji will likewise kill you too. Give him leave soon." Then (he) gave the Raje leave, with robes (of honour). "I shall petition the Badshah and get (you a ) *saranjam*." — So he said. Then the Raje came to his quarters. "Jafar Khan also has not spoken frankly. Well! Whatever the Shri will do is right." So saying he remained silent.

The next day, the Badshah, appointed Fulad Khan, Kotwal, (with) five thousand cavalry and infantry (to be) near the Raje and (gave him the following) order, "Thou shouldst stay around the Raje's quarters keeping careful watch (over it). "Thereupon the Kotwal came and pitched (his) tent. Then the Raje became scared. He began to feel distressed. He lamented much, holding Sambhaji Raje to his breast. (52) Niraji Pant, and Dattaji Pant, and Trimbak Pant consoled (him) in various ways. Then the Raje said, "What device should we now resort to?" While (they were) so deliberating, night fell. Then Shri Bhavani came in a dream and showed herself (saying), "Do not be anxious. I shall take thee back hence, with (thy) son, casting confusion on all (thy) foes, by means of the bewitching weapon. Do not be an anxious." In this manner (did the goddess) assure (him) of safety. Then the Raje awoke, told his relatives (all about the dream), and felt secure.

The next day (he) got by purchase various kinds of sweets. Obtaining bamboo baskets (he) filled ten baskets with sweets employing two porters for each basket, (and) inserting a rod of wood in the middle, (he) sent the sweet to the wazirs. The man of the watch asked, - "Whose baskets (are these) ? Where do they go ?" The porters answered, "The Raje has sent sweets to a few *wazirs*. They opened one or two (baskets) (and) found (there were) really sweets. Then (they) let (them) pass. This process was continued everyday. Then after eight or four days he instructed his *sawars* and some *karkuns* to get away. Then they all fled.

Then one day the Raje and his son crouched in a basket. Sending baskets before and behind (them), they set out, seated in the middle one. At that time, the Raje took off all his garments, dressed Hiroji Farzand (in them) and made him sleep on his cot. His uncovered hand alone was left visible outside. And (he) was laid wrapped in a coverlet. And a boy was kept for massaging (his limbs). Having selected a place in a village, three *cosses* beyond Delhi, (he) had previously sent the *karkuns* attached to him (there). And the two of them set out seated in a basket. The men of the watch, inspected one or two of the foremost baskets (by) opening (them), (and) let the others pass without opening. Arriving at a place two

*cosses* outside the city, they left the baskets, set out on foot, and went to the village, where the *karkuns* were. (The Raje) took the *karkuns* with (him). All of them sat in a jungle and (there) argued, - (53) "If we go straight to home now, an army will be sent in pursuit, turning to that direction. We should not go towards (home). We should go to the opposite side of Delhi, we should go towards Benares." So deciding, the Raje, and Sambhaji Raje, and Niraji Rauji, and Dattaji Trimbak, and Ragho Mitra Maratha, - (these men) left (the jungle) (and) set out. The rest were told to go where they liked. (The Raje) himself, the prince, and the other men, (who were) *karkuns*, besmeared their bodies with ashes and putting on the disguise of *pakirs* went towards Muttra.

In the meantime, Hiroji Farzand, was lying on the cot, at Delhi. For four quarters (*prahas*) of the night, and three quarters of the next day, he lay like that. Fulad Khan's watch men, coming into the room, found that the Raje was sleeping wrapped in a coverlet, (and) the boy was massaging his legs. The men asked the boy, "(Why) is the Raje sleeping (so) long to-day?" The boy answered, - "(His) head aches." Seeing it the men retired. In that manner Hiroji lay for three quarters of the day. When there was (only) one quarter of the day left Hiroji got up, put on his wrapper, breeches, and turban and came out with the boy (with him). To the enquiries of the watchmen Hiroji answered - "(His) head aches. If any one tries to go into his room, forbid him. I am fetching medicine." So instructing the watchmen, the two went out. (Hiroji) went to Ram Sing's camp, told him the news in private, and getting out thence, took the road for the Deccan.

Then Ran Sing went to see the Badshah. He submitted to the Badshah, "Shivaji had come through our mediation. The Badshah has set (on him) separate guards. I have no concern (with him)."

The Badshah answered, "You have no concern. He is a servant of the Badshah, and the Badshah will look after his welfare. You have nothing to do with him." (When the Badshah had) said so, Ram Sing returned to his quarters, after making (his) obeisance.

It was the ninth hour of the day. At the ninth hour the watchmen reflected - "There is no concourse of men to-day. . . The servant says that the Raje is unwell. After that no one comes or goes, what is the matter?" So they went into the room to see (but) then, there was no one on the cot. It so appeared, that the Raje had fled. Finding this, Fulad Khan reported the news to the Badshah, - "The Raje was in the room. Though we had been paying repeated visits of inspection, he suddenly disappeared. Whether he has fled, or entered into the earth, or gone (up) in the sky—we cannot surmise. We have been (very) close (to him). He vanished in our view. (We) do not know what device he took." As he reported so, the

Badshah felt astonished and was much perplexed. And issuing injunctions to the (whole of his) army, (he) sent two *lakhs* and sixty thousand *sawars*, to search (for Shivaji), in eight directions. He told (them), "Shivaji is clever in devices. He must be going under some disguise. You should therefore look through the disguises of the *jangams*, *yogis*, *sanyasis*, *tapsis*, *bairagis*, *nanakpanthis*, *gorakhpantthis*, *fakirs*, brahmans, beggars, *brahmacharis*, *Paramhanses*, mad men, and various others, detect the Raje and bring him a prisoner. Having given such hints, (he) despatched them. The soldiers rode in four directions. And the Badshah cherished the suspicion in his mind, (that) - "The Raje must be hiding somewhere in the city, and at night (he) will commit some treachery." Accordingly, after making investigations, (and) appointing careful watchmen, he sat (all night) awake on his cot. Men with girt waist were kept near (him) night and day. In this manner he lived.

Then the Raje and the prince went on by stages and reached Muttra. (While) looking for some acquaintances in Muttra, (they found) Krishnaji Pant and Kashi Rau and Visaji Pant, three *Peshwas*, — whom Niraji Pant knew. The party went (to their house) and met them, and related the news. They summoned resolution and agreed (to his proposal). Thereupon the Raje left (his) son Sambhaji Raje in their house, (with the following instruction) — "I shall send you a messenger and letter, intimating that I have reached home in my own kingdom. Come home with the prince, all (three) brothers with your families. I shall maintain you, in every way. I shall make you prosperous and give a reward." So saying he left the prince, and went to Benares, taking Krishnaji Pant, one of the brothers, in his company. "Get the religious rites at Gaya and Prayag performed for me through (men) you know — "So saying, (he) took him in his company, and came to Benares. There (he) performed the bath in secret, visited Shri Vishveshvar and performed the bath at Prayag and the *gayavarjan* ceremony. There he contracted an immense loan and performed (deeds of) charity. Then it was so arranged that he should come home to his own kingdom. Should they go by the direct route? The Badshah's army had gone that way, so they should not go. So deciding he came through Gondawana, Bhaganagar and Bijapur to Rajgad. On the way vigorous searches were made at many places, and ruin and treachery seemed to be imminent. But Shri Bhavani guarded (him) and brought him safe and sound. Niraji Pant and Dattaji Pant and Raghoji Maratha, these four came. On his arrival at Rajgad, big charities and great festivities were made. Sugar was distributed, (and) cannon were fired. The *Matushri* and the *Karkuns*, and the soldiers in the army, and the forts, and strongholds, and the militia, all were pleased and held festivities.

## Draupadi Taken to the Court-hall

SHRIDHAR

SHRIDHAR (Śrīdhar, 1658-1729) was the son of Brahmananda Khadke. He took to writing in his middle life. Among his works are *Hari Vijaya*, *Rama Vijaya*, *Pandav Pratap* and *Shivlilamrita*, all of them based on puranas and epics. The following is an excerpt from *Pandav Pratap*.

Dharmaraja who has no enemy  
is righteously religious, and, is the very spirit of religion.  
He never gave up religious duties and  
devotion to God and the Brahmins, (1)

The most wicked Kauravas  
played deceitful dice with them  
and won their kingdom, army, country, wealth, and  
even Draupadi— (2)

Five Pandavas — like five lions —  
came and fell into the well of deceit;  
Or, five swans were lured, and  
were bogged down in a ditch of mud. (3)

Says Duryodhan to Vidur:  
“We have conquered the Pandavas and humbled them,  
like deer trapped in the wild-fire  
becoming lustreless, hungry and hapless. (4)

“Draupadi is our slave-woman now  
Arise, summon her and bring her to the court-hall.  
We shall test before the people  
her fidelity.” (5)

Says Vidur: “You, most sinful,  
your end is certainly near now.  
How unholy are the words you utter:  
You — most wicked and deceitful!” (6)

Duryodhan says: “Behold!  
He is the supporter of the Pandavas.  
Superficial is the prudence he is preaching:  
Ruinous is the foe who is hostile to our prospects.” (7)

To the son of a slave-girl around  
 commands Duryodhan,  
 "Summon and bring Panchali to the court-hall  
 without any hesitation." (8)

The servant entered the palace  
 and said: "O Princess of Drupad,  
 know that you are summoned over there  
 by Duryodhan." (9)

Dharma lost all;  
 nobody can challenge his word  
 —Draupadi said to herself—  
 the disaster has now set in. (10)

She felt as though a dagger was thrust into her heart,  
 Or, the lightning befell her head,  
 Or a *vajra* had struck  
 the delicate lotus. (11)

Then says Draupadi to him;  
 "Go and tell Bhishma and Dronacharya—  
 you are venerable to the whole assembly:  
 why this evil deed?" (12)

"Dharma has staked himself and lost  
 hence, he is under your control  
 Between Dharma and us  
 what relation is left now?" (13)

"Look, I am the wife of five men:  
 therefore, I am not entirely won!  
 Narada had ordained the division of the days to be shared  
 He made this division inviolable. (14)

He distributed the year among my five men,  
 and gave each, two months and twelve days in which to own me.  
 At the moment, I am entirely the wife of Bhim  
 How can Dharma, then, stake and lose me?" (15)

The emissary then comes to the Court  
 and relates the situation to Duryodhan.  
 Tells him, "Draupadi has just had her post-menstrual bath  
 and asks — how can he bring her to the court?" (16)

Duryodhan reviles at him  
Then asks Dusshasan  
to rush and drag her to the Court  
pulling her by the hair. (17)

"Now that she has become our slave-woman,"  
says Duryodhan, "Why bother about her?"  
Dusshasan rushed immediately  
and reached Draupadi, (18)

As a mighty tiger swoops down  
furiously upon a doe,  
or, a dacoit storms along  
into the Royal Treasury (19)

Or, as Sita, the jewel born on the earth,  
the ten-mouthed Ravan had rushed to catch  
So, coming to Yajnaseni  
Says the malevolent Dusshasan: (20)

"Now get up instantly from here;  
King Duryodhan summons you;  
your five husbands, having been conquered  
have been made our slaves. (21)

"Now that you are a slave-woman  
arise, hasten to the Court.  
It is a dawn of good fortune for you,  
accept Duryodhan now." (22)

Like a death-emissary at the end of life  
did seem Dusshasan to Draupadi,  
With her throat choked  
She spoke out: (23)

"O brother-in-law, listen—  
how can you take a woman to the Court!  
I am the wife of your eldest brother.  
I am to you what Mother Gandhari is to you. (24)

"O brother-in-law,  
you be my saviour in this hour.  
Take flawless triumph to your credit.  
Mediate for me as best you can. (25)



"O brother-in-law, be my mother,  
By saving me, save yourself from disgrace,  
Be my father, the King of Drupad,  
O compassionate one! (26)

"Or, take your weapon in you hand  
and kill me here and now.  
People will admire you for this  
and sing your glory." (27)

Sinful, merciless Dusshasan says—  
"Volatile woman, get up and come to the Court  
I'll hold you by your hair and drag you there.  
Now you are our slave. . ." (28)

How can a way-layer  
have affection?  
Repentance will never dawn upon  
the wicked. (29)

The rapacious never likes religion  
What is a pious deed to a paramour?  
The ungodly never likes love,  
—never will he like the path of worship (30)

Fire is never quiet.  
The wicked never speak sweetly.  
Has a donkey ever sat absorbed in meditation?  
This will never happen! (31)

Now that the calamity is imminent,  
Draupadi got up from there.  
And started towards the interior of the house.  
Dusshasan too rushed there. (32)

She, the aroma of whose body lingers  
half a *yojan*,  
whose resplendence spreads everywhere,  
Her hair was clutched by Dusshasan. (33)

The sister of Lord Shrikrishna cried out for help  
as she was pulled down to the ground,  
The entire universe tattered at this moment  
The waters of the seas surged up. . . (34)

The moon and the sun  
feared they might fall on the earth.  
Vaikuntha and Kailas at that moment  
were rocked in agony. (35)

Dragging the most beautiful woman by her hair,  
the monster sets out for the crowded Court  
as, having grabbed a doe, a lion  
hastens away. (36)

From *Pandav Pratap*, 17th-18th century

Tr. by Pradheep Gopal  
Deshpande

## The Royal Edict

RAMACHANDRA NILAKANTHA AMATYA

*Ajnapatra* (Ajnāṇpatra) is one of the first volumes of political writing in Marathi. It was written by RAMACHANDRA NILAKANTHA AMATYA (Rāmacandra Nilakantha Amātya, 1650-1717) at the behest of Sambhaji II in 1716. The first two chapters are devoted to pay tribute to Shivaji and to make an appraisal in retrospect of the upheavals which Maratha rule survived in the times of Sambhaji and Rajaram. Chapters 3 to 9 offer the political analysis of the various strategies Shivaji adopted. After his father Amatya Nilo Sonadev's death, Ramachandra worked as *Amatya* for Shivaji. This exposed him directly to the political insights of Shivaji. Between 1689 and 1700, he worked as *Amatya* to Rajaram too. His *Rajinīti* is one of the greatest legacies relating to the war of Maratha independence and the principles of state policy which Shivaji had laid down.

The following excerpts are from *Ajnapatra*:

### 1

## The Origin of Kingship

The whole world is created by God. God is the ruler of all. He first created kings in this world. Amongst the people every individual is one but the temperaments of many differ. Therefore if they have no protector who would make for them one common law? They would quarrel and fight with one another and be destroyed. This should not happen. All the people should be free from trouble and should follow the path of *Dharma*. Out of compassion for the people God in his full favour has granted us this kingdom.

### Private Functions of the King

Realizing in mind fully the fear that, if this command of God is disobeyed, God's anger will fall on him, a ruler without ascending the throne but keeping himself vigilant and restrained should be ready all the time to look after the welfare of the people. Similarly, believing firmly that his gains and losses are in the hands of God and that they cannot be altered by any one, and supplicating God for protection all the time, not becoming dependent on others internally and not disregarding the service of his servants, he should act with unswerving justice by attracting the minds of servants to himself according to rank and by adopting proper methods. He should follow that *Dharma* which is traditionally the best and which his ancestors had followed, and should do that by which fame is acquired. He should have great fear of bad reputation in all undertakings. Kings who lived in the past succeeded in this world and acquired the next with the help of *Dharma*. Believing with a firm confidence that the practice of *Dharma*, the worship of God, the acquisition of the favour of saintly persons, the attainment of the welfare of all, and the prosperity of the dynasty of the kingdom should be uninterrupted and regulated, he should settle grants according to their special religious merit on temples of Gods, places of pilgrimage, holy centres of religion, hermitages of saints and places of *samadhi*, so that the daily ablution of water, worship, offerings, annual pilgrimages (and) great festivals may be well performed; and he should continue them uninterruptedly by making frequent kindly inquiries. Showing great devotion to Brahmans, *Vaidikas*, those versed in *shastras*, those free from desire and worldly ties, those subsisting on alms but without begging, those living in forests, those practising austerity and holy men, and providing for their maintenance being carried to wherever they are, and satisfying them in all ways, he should acquire blessings for the increase of his welfare. He should not put faith, however, in those persons who assume disguises, fakirs, yogis, jagams and others who practise merely sorcery and wander about, and without trusting them, he should through his servants send them away after giving them a few alms. Heretic opinions which are against *Dharma* should in no way be allowed to prevail. If anywhere any heresy were to rise then he should by (making) personal inquiry punish it duly so that no one would follow that wicked path. He should also destroy it, not associating himself with those practising austerities and those of irritable temperament, and inquiring about them from a distance he should see that they live contented and give blessings. Holding universal compassion towards the blind, the crippled, the diseased, the helpless and those without any means of subsistence, he should arrange for their means of livelihood so long as they live.

## 3

## Personal Protection and Private Servants

Except in case of mortal fight kings should always be very careful at least about their personal protection. After careful inquiry those persons who are very trustworthy, hereditarily in service, honest and not greedy should be appointed in kitchens, places of water and fruits, dressing-rooms and other important royal household departments, as also in other public royal establishments. By taking work from those according to the functions allotted to them and by treating all with equal regard by virtue of his authority, he would keep them contented and look after them so that none of them would feel any want about their maintenance. Everything should be done which should keep them ready and pleased in his service. If any doubt is felt at some time or other about their conduct, an immediate inquiry should be made in accordance with justice. Whatever makes them engage in work undoubtedly with an open mind should be done. If a doubt against a servant cannot be removed he should be positively dismissed (from that work) and given other work. If he deserves punishment then he should be punished. This matter should not be neglected. Similarly those servants who are to be kept near himself should be judged as to whether they are very trustworthy and intelligent, act after knowing their master's purpose, understand the signs of his internal thoughts, and are brave, of agreeable appearance, with auspicious marks and are not zealous, cruel, self-willed and of wicked disposition; and then they should be employed. They should be treated cordially and with kind regard, and whatever makes them live loyally and devotedly without caring for any other master but himself, should be done. They should be paid well so that they should not find it necessary to look to others for their maintenance. They should be made to observe a certain amount of discipline so that they do not get accustomed to going to other's houses without permission, to speaking out secrets, and similarly to committing any wrong against others out of any sudden impulse whilst they are near their master, to insulting high officials and to carrying tales about any one. From amongst them every one should be promoted and encouraged according to the measure or importance of his work.

## 4

## Personal Routine and Discipline

He should fix his times for meals and water-drinking and should not change them. Intoxicating drugs should never be taken, and those people

who remain near him should never be allowed to taste them. When he is without arms he should not keep looking down all the time. He should acquire knowledge and skill in all kinds of arms and should always increase it by practice. Exercise in elephant and horse-riding should never be neglected. All the methods of making new arrows, bows, matchlocks and other arms, of filling rockets, of casting cannon, or laying mines and mounting batteries, and similarly, all the arts of making strong saddles, harness, armour, and other equipment, should be well known. In this way after appreciating the merit of every one according to the efforts made by him, he should be duly rewarded. Otherwise if he be given less, the fault of want of appreciation would fall to his credit; and if he be given more, carelessness would be attributed to him; but when he knows the real nature of work, both these faults would not occur. For this purpose the above is written. Skill in all arts and crafts should be necessarily acquired. But those industries which require exertion should not be personally worked at. For, while one is engaged in these occupations, or if any bodily disease is caused by them, state affairs would get neglected.

## 5

### King's Behaviour

Kings should be moderate in speech. Unless there is work they should not keep on talking with anybody and anything whatever. If they talk in such a manner, the servants get unduly intimate and unrestrained. After necessarily giving encouragement to persons in a wise manner, those with whom discussions are to be made about what is to be done and not to be done, and about the good or the bad side of the situation which has arisen, should be made to speak in political matters. Kings should listen to them attentively. If what they say appeals to their own judgement, then it should be accepted, being considered to be the best. If those people have not been able to deliberate or advise well, then without treating them with indifference and by stating their own views openly and without showing any impatience, kings should discuss fully the merits and demerits of the work to be undertaken. People should be made to realize those merits and demerits. Other daily work which is to be entrusted to ordinary servants should generally be given by signs. But they should not always continue using signs, such as gestures of eyes, hands, feet and other members, or restlessness of body. They should practise steadiness of seat, like a post or a mountain. Kings should not utter the faults of any servants high or low. If any faults are found, they should not be communicated to others. After keeping them in mind means should be employed to remedy

them. The servant should be under the impression that whatever fault he has committed is not known to the master. This impression keeps the servants obedient, nay, they are even careful to remedy their faults. Then it becomes easy to correct their faults.

## 6

### Prince's Education

Even kings do not give up vices and adopt virtues once for all. For this purpose, a few good persons should be kept near the princes to correct or to guide them. They should always be made to live in their company. They should be made to do strictly the study of *shastras* and of writing without any idleness on their part. Similarly, royal teachers, such as professional wrestlers and other experts who are well-versed in the arts and knowledge of spear-throwing, sword-playing, wrestling and athletic exercises should be engaged. Under their instructions each of those arts should be taught. Through false kindness studies should not be allowed to be neglected. The reason is that the ideal Hindu king is God himself who is the teacher of the whole world and is the distributor of weal and woe to all. If the worldly king is endowed with virtues, then the welfare of the greatest number is possible; if he is possessed of vices, the misery of the most is the result. Therefore "the king is the maker of the age". Consequently kings should possess many virtues. Even though they have studied all sciences, they have become endowed with all virtues, they have acquired a kingdom by the favour of God, and they are praised by all people, still they should not feel satisfied with this. They should always give thought to their own merits and defects. Nay, even one or two good men who are honest, influential, thoughtful and of sharp understanding should always be kept near by way of constant company. They should be definitely ordered that they should always give warning about the faults committed or things not done by him. By respecting them like elderly persons they should be attentively listened to. By not resenting their timely advice they should be treated with respect, and their words of encouragement should be looked upon as a source of gratification. As a consequence those persons feeling easiness of mind will warn him about the faults committed by him which he must abandon. Consequently, as the root of a tree makes the tree grow strong in a well-watered place, so the king, who is the root of the kingdom and is endowed with virtues, causes the growth of the kingdom.

## 7

## Quality of Tolerance in a King

Kings should be very tolerant, for the reason that the king is the lord of a large number of people and all are generally not of the same character. Every one has some faults or others, nay, every one from the poor upwards to the highest officers get angry at times. In anger they carry on indecent wordy discussions. At that time keeping himself tranquil and keeping a smiling face in order to please them he should well consider the offence committed by them. Proper punishment should be awarded. As a consequence later on wise men feel ashamed of their behaviour and, becoming grateful to the master, do not commit again the same faults. So without toleration the way of making servants give up their faults is not possible.

Form *Ajnapatra*, 18th century

Tr. by S.V. Puntambekar

## The Decade of Panipat

KRISHNAJI SHYAMRAO

*Bakhar* was a popular form of prose writing in medieval Marathi. Basically, it is a record of historical events or an account highlighting the glorious achievements of brave rulers or noblemen. It is believed that there are at present about 200 *bakhars* available for reference.

*Bhausahebanchi Bakhar*, written between 1773 and 1790, by Krishnaji Shyamrao (Krishnaji Syāmrao, 18th century), gives an authentic and lively account of the famous battle of Panipat, which was of crucial importance to Peshwa rule. It has been hailed as a landmark in this genre for its literary merits. It offers a memorable account of the events and has been widely appreciated for its art of characterization and style of narration.

The following excerpts are from chapters VII and XV of *Bhausahebanchi Bakhar*.

## 1

## The Death of Dattaji Shinde

On that same day Abdul Ali Durani and Sujayatdaula and Najibkhan Rohila and Amadkhan Langada and Kutubshah and Dundekhan Rohila

had taken a large town which was called Shahdara across the Jumna and which was the chief market town of Antarved, and also Panchagan — the two towns together might be the half of Delhi, and these they had taken and destroyed. In all they had one lakh and forty thousand men. The eve of the festival of Sankrant was on the fourteenth of the bright half of Paush and upon that day the Duranis encamped on the banks of the Jumna. The Marathas were drinking their water from the near bank of the river while the Duranis were drinking from the far bank and the two armies saw each other clearly. When they saw that the Shindes had strong forces with them, the enemy were much perplexed. On that day Dattaji Shinde sent an elephant into the ford of Rajghat, which is opposite to Delhi, to sound the depth of the Jumna, but it found no bottom. Likewise he sounded the for which is near the Revenue Hill and there also there was no footing. Then evening came and they passed the greater part of the night in their tents. When one watch of the night remained Dattaji Shinde sent Janrao Vambale to guard the ford which was closest. Maloji Shinde, who was a noble and worthy man he sent with a thousand men to the Rajghat ford close to Delhi. The day dawned. Shinde had with him five or six famous elephants, a light baggage-train and a treasury of three lakhs of rupees. Among the elephants there were four that were without price called Javahargaj Patagaj, Krisnagaj and Ramban, and their mahouts were fine proud men. Dattaji Shinde received all four with great honour and to them gave most strict injunction saying, "Friends! Our end has come upon us and our honour is put to the question. At this last hour it is our mind to hobble the elephants before we fight." When they heard this the mahouts replied. "Raosaheb, for many days we have eaten your food. Never shall we lose courage. The time of our deaths has come and we shall not escape." Then they commanded themselves one to another, and the great bells which were on their elephants were sounded. When the third watch of the day had come the whole army ate and offered *tilagula* and then engaged themselves in preparing for battle. Then also Abdul Ali's troops and ordnance were made ready and some marched upon the Rajghat for, some upon the Revenue Hill for and some upon the Rewari ford. Then Gajudikhan vazir came down from the fort and said to Dattaji Shinde, "You are Marathas. You are defending the fords, but that is a Mogul style of war. They might do it but our people will never be able to make a stand here. You should abandon the ford and remain at a distance making raids upon them and then I will defend the fort or come with you." But at once Dattaji Shinde replied, "You should return to the fort and fear not. We shall not do battle to hold any fords today." And so saying he sent him on his way.



Then the Duranis' troops and cannon arrived on the opposite bank. Fortune was not with the Marathas but against them, and so the Jumna gave passage to the enemy. The cannons on the far bank began to fire and at the ford the courage of Janrao Vambale began to fail. Led by camel-guns on their camels and elephant-guns upon elephants the enemy horsemen began to cross in strength. Two hours of the day had passed when a messenger from Janrao Vambale came riding up and said, "Patilbava, why do you sit here inactive. The Durani troops are already across the Jumna and will not let us stand above the ford. One hundred and more men are killed by the cannons' fire." When he heard this news Dattaji Shinde straight away ordered Bayaji Shinde, the son of Sabaji Shinde, who was seated by him, saying, "Bayajibaba, you should go to the aid of Janrao Vambale." At this command Bayaji Shinde immediately arose, saluted him and answered, 'Patilsaheb, when we came from Lahore we fled without fighting the Giljyas, and therefore there was much trouble in our mind. The Durani had forty thousand men and before such an army what should our four thousand men do? But let that be! Now again the moment has come and this time our master is at hand. So many days we have eaten our master's salt. Let him now see with his own eyes what service we shall do him." When he said this Dattaji Shinde replied. "Bayajibaba, you were always a doughty fighter and are no novice in battle. It should cause no surprise if you do your whole duty for it would be strange if you did not. But now there is no leisure to speak more, so make haste." Thus he spoke and Bayajji Shinde took five or six thousand men and went down to the ford through the marshes of the river. By then half the Durani and other soldiers had crossed to the nearer side so that Bayajibaba decided in his own mind. "The Durani army has crossed the river. How can we now show our faces to Dattaji Shinde?" Then Bayaji Shinde with fifteen notables from his five thousand man spurred on his horse and rode to the attack. He was struck by a bullet and killed and he fell with half his body on the sand and half in the water. Ten men were killed along with him. The Marathas then completely abandoned the ford so that the Duranis captured it and made their stand upon the hither side. Yet still the Duranis were in awe of the power of Dattaji Shinde.

Then a horseman of Bayaji Shinde came riding to Dattaji Shinde and said to him. "Patilbava, Bayaji Shinde has fallen. They have carried off his corpse and captured the ford and assembled their army beyond." Upon hearing this Dattaji Shinde sounded the drum and mounted his horse. The army was already prepared. Jankoji Shinde put on a coat of mail but Dattaji Shinde angrily took off the armour from his body, saying, "Today we are not going to war. Malharrao Holkar is near and will arrive within a day or two. Until that time we should stand off and fight by craft."

Saying this he mounted and rode towards the ford. Then the army was mustered and when this had been done the order was given. "Ride with the standards", and so they set the troops behind the standards. There on the banks of the Jumna were many obstacles. The clumps of rushes were so thick that nothing could be seen and it was into these that they entered. Drive a Maratha into battle and he will have no stomach for it, and now here by great good fortune they had found these rushes to hide in! Many felt that it was no shame to do so. Now the standards went on and joined battle and then the Giljyas fired against them from both sides a salvo of cannon and elephant-guns and camel-guns and swivels and bombards and gingalls and mortars, together with various flint-lock and match-lock muskets so that there was a great cracking noise like grain that is grilling on the pan or the crack of lightning. There was great slaughter. Showers of rockets fell like rain. Men and horses were as if stunned and one man could not recognize another. There were men there of great valour whose courage all sank away. Until this time the Marathas had never seen a battle such as this and the destruction was without equal. Only those who were there at that time will understand what they had to undergo. From all sides the tremendous fire came without cease for an hour or more. Two *kos* distant from that place was another ford where was Govindpant Bunde. There also they crossed the Jumna and men were stupified by the noise of the guns. He had no opportunity to come to them. There also five or six hundred choice troops had their heads lopped off. Likewise Maloji Shinde who was at Raighat by Delhi, he also fled away from the ford and while crossing close to Shahdara came within range of the rockets. From there too the enemy soldiers came and the whole of Maloji Shinde's force was caught at close quarters. Because of this only those few escaped whose lives were not doomed to end. Maloji Shinde himself had escaped out of range of the rockets when he decided within his heart. "Dattaji Shinde has criticised many a man in our presence, and now how can we show our face before him?" And so he set his horse towards the battle and disappeared in it without trace. No one ever saw his body more. Meanwhile Dattaji Shinde was engaged in fierce fighting. There were not even five hundred horsemen round the standard. For firstly they were Maratha troops and their courage was not firm, and in addition were the difficulties of the ground so that by misfortune the soldiers became lost among these impediments. An army of forty thousand is not small, but some there were who disappeared in all this broken ground, Jankoji Shinde was fighting by the standard and Dattaji Shinde was to the side on the right. On the Delhi side on the right he stood with twenty-five noble companions. The Giljyas were in awe of him. Their power was so great but no one came fearlessly to strike at him directly. Now it had come to

hand-to-hand fighting. The elephant-bell was sounding. Three hours had gone by. Five hundred men had been killed and as many horses had fallen. There were many wounded also. Everywhere was mud and carnage. There close to him was a nobleman called Tanaji Kharade who begged him saying, "Patilbava, the whole of the Durani's army has now crossed. Over that way Govindpant Bundele has been overrun and of Maloji Shinde there is no trace. The standard is undefended and our honour almost gone. It would be better now to withdraw." As soon as he spoke this Dattaji Shinde replied, "We are all dead and the world is lost. Honour is departed and who then wishes to be saved? Does it only remain to us to flee? A full battle is now engaged. If we withdraw the standards the army will start to run. And should I also flee? How might I, Dattaji, show my face in the Desh ever again." When he had said this Tanaji Kharade again spoke saying, "What have gods and demi-gods and demons been doing since the world began? And we are only mortal men! We should accept the thing that has come upon us and regarding only our own situation, to which fate has brought us, we should flee." Then Dattaji Shinde answered him straight. "This is Abdul Ali the Emperor of Kandahar who fights against us and if God brings us death upon this field it is well. Yogis and ascetics and those who have abandoned the world mortify their bodies in many ways in order that they may attain release, but this one thing is our apportioned duty as warriors—that on the battlefield we should never turn away—and if we achieve this we attain all. And such action in this world God has now brought thick upon us. He who turns his back now will be truly misfortunate. If he leaves the field and flees he will lose both this world and the next. Here is the path to hell! Here is defeat more bitter than death! Surely death is better." And so he stood on unmoving.

Then Jankoji Shinde who was fighting close by the standard was all at once struck in the arm by a bullet. The arm was broken and the bone pierced through, Jankoji Shinde swooned and fell from his horse. Then his equerry who was nearby came running to Dattaji Shinde and fearfully told him the news, "Babasaheb has been struck by a bullet and fallen." When he heard this Dattaji said to the people who stopped near him, "Baba has left us. Now we have more cause to show our face in the Desh. It would be better if death came in the field, for if not we must take poison and so die."

Saying this Dattaji Shinde, along with eighteen persons there, spurred his horse against the ten thousand Durani soldiers of the emperor who stood before him. As their horses' heads penetrated the enemy lines eleven of his choice companions fell dead. The rest struck out around them.

There was no way to retreat and they came out behind under the fire of enemy bullets. Then Yashvantrao Jagadale of Thorai was struck by a bullet and killed. His brother Piraji Jagadale was with him and he strove with great effort to carry away his brother's body. The Patil briefly reined back his horse Lalmani and was shouting, "Save the body! Save it." When all at once, as if the cord of heaven had snapped, a bullet struck him in the ribs beneath the arm and he fell from his horse. Nearby were Tanaji and Rajaram Chopdar and Raghoba Shenvi, the Pagnis. They all thought, "We have eaten his food for many days and through him have enjoyed all the ease that a man could wish. Now it were better to die than to abandon him here." Therefore they dismounted. He was sorely wounded. His men were in haste to carry him away before his life was spent, but they had no time to do this before Kutubshah, the guru of Najibkhan, arrived at that place seated in his *howdah*. Then Raghoba Pagnis said to Rajaram Chopdar, "Do you go up to Kutubshah and say to him that Dattaji Shinde lies wounded on the field and that he should save him. Or else if he falls into the hands of the wicked Abdul Ali Durani both we and the Patil will lose our heads. Better to be taken prisoner by Kutubshah!" And so Rajaram Chopdar was sent. Kutubshah's *howdah* came close, whereupon Rajaram Chopdar saluted him. By night and by day he frequented him much and their acquaintance was of long standing. Therefore he asked him in the Muslim tongue, "Rajaram, what do you do there?" he replied with the true tidings saying, "Saheb, the Patil is wounded. Please save him." Hearing this Kutubshah was overjoyed as one who without effort obtains some unlooked for gain—drawing butter from the cow or refined sugar from the cane. "Where is the Patil?" said he. "Show me." So Rajaram led him just as he was, still seated upon his elephant, to where Dattaji Shinde lay wounded. He got down from his *howdah* and went to him. Dattaji Shinde lay there on his back and Kutubshah said to him, "Patil, will you fight once more with me?" Dattaji Shinde was conscious and he knew full well that this man would never spare him and that it was not fitting to reply with dishonourable words. Therefore he made his heart strong and answered, "If it be the will of Allah! If I live I will fight again." As soon as he heard this Kutubshah drew a sword from his waist, turned Dattaji Shinde over with his foot and cut off his head. Raghoba Pagnis and Rajaram Chopdar supplicated most piteously, "Saheb, spare him. If you wish we will give a crore of rupees." So they spoke, but he would not hear them and achieved his awful purpose. Three and a half hours of the day were now spent. Kutubshah impaled the head upon a spear and carried it away to the sound of many instruments. The news reached Najibkhan that they had been victorious and then Kutubshah himself arrived. They took down the head and wrapped it in a cloth.

### The End of Ibhramkhan and Bhausahab

Now the Peshwa's army and Ibhramkhan Gardi by mighty efforts had once broken the enemy and driven him back onto his own ground, and at that time Abdul Ali Durani had fled most cravenly for two *kos* back to the banks of the Jumna. Seeing this Najibkhan Rohila bit his lip in fear and in great consternation descended from his howdah. Likewise did Dundekhan Rohila and Amadkhan Langada descend and go on foot; and when the news was brought that Shinde and Holkar were on the right wing they left them and advanced against the (Maratha) left wing. The first attack fell upon Shamsheer Bahadur and at that time Shamsheer Bahadur fought very valiantly, advancing beyond the guns and performing deeds of as much bravery as any could desire. He received many wounds upon his body but (in the end) his troops fled away. Similarly they in turn launched their attack on Damaji Gaikwad. For a little while he fought hard, then he too moved aside and fled. Then in the same way their assault fell upon Vitthal Shivdev also, and on Antaji Mankeshvar and Yashvantrao Pavar and they also strove greatly as much as they were able but their troops would not stand and keep their station. And so they had no recourse left to them and they also were destroyed. Then the enemy turned upon Ibhramkhan Gardi. Now the battle was still continuing in Bhausahab's quarter and as time went on it became hand-to-hand. At this time hearing the news of Vishvasrao, Jankoji Shinde and Tukoji Holkar with great courage fought their way to Bhausahab. Then came the Duranis and fell upon Ibhramkhan Gardi. Thinking nothing of his life he did all that a man could ask of a soldier. So many Gardis were slain, but no one came to their aid. Thus in one short moment five thousand Gardis fell and it was as if they had never been. The nearby Peshwa troops began to flee. The guns fell silent. He himself wielded his sword up to the end. (The remaining Gardis) mingled with the Giljya army and killed ten or more notable men. The Giljyas surrounded them all about and they received many wounds upon their bodies. Those Duranis who had begun to flee turned back again. The Gardi corpses lay in heaps. Ibhramkhan Gardi's son and nephew who were there were slain, but Ibhramkhan himself continued to fight even though he had become faint with wounds. When his efforts would no more suffice his weapon fell and they seized him and carried him away.

This news became known to Bhausahab. On all sides now was destruction and great confusion. Yashvantrao Pavar also was killed. No

man could now take thought for another. Ibhramkhan Gardi's force had been destroyed where it stood. It was as if it had never been! Elsewhere there was fierce fighting on Malharrao Holkar's wing, but when they could no longer resist they abandoned this side and departed. Then the whole attack fell upon the Peshwa's troops. At that time they did deeds of great prowess as might be expected of them. Marathas had never fought like this since the Maratha kingdom began. Bhausaheb called upon his opponents by name and defied them. He himself was now mounted upon a horse. Now that Vishvasrao had been killed what face could he show to Nanasaheb? While he was plunged in this sorrow the whole weight of the attack fell upon Bhausaheb. The clash of swords began and among Bhausaheb's people the ditch became filled with horses and men. Men all exhausted wandered helplessly. They could not think where to flee. And thus the third watch ended.

For a further two hours Bhausaheb fought together with the Peshwa's troops, but on the left all had been lost. When the heavens are rent can they yet be patched? Then Bhausaheb dismounted from his horse. There was foam on Bhausaheb's lips as he constantly shouted, "Strike! Strike!" How can one describe with what great ardour he was fighting then? All the great officers of state and men of high birth had fled, whereupon Bhausaheb said to Sonaji Bhapkar, "Friend Sonaji, we should not have set out this day. I had put much trust in you." Then Sonaji replied, "I shall turn back those who are fleeing. How can we abandon our lord?" And so saying he went to turn the men back. He went away. Then Tukoji Shinde began to speak, "Maharaj, all that a warrior should do has been done. Now it would be best to go." Then Bhausaheb replied, "Tukoba, to whom now should we go? What face can we show to Nanasaheb? See what has now befallen Raosaheb, and what of the faith that we swore to Ibhramkhan Gardi?" Hearing this Tukoji Shinde answered him again, "Bhausaheb, if only you are saved you may have revenge for them all. Otherwise when you are gone all things will be finished." Hearing this Bhausaheb again said, "What face can I show to Nanasaheb in Poona? After what has befallen Vishvasrao we cannot depart. Through God's power whatever is to happen upon this field let it now happen, but never shall I submit." When he said this Tukoji leapt down from his horse and himself plied his sword. There he performed deeds of great heroism, making prodigies of Maratha valour seem easy. Then all at once a bullet struck him and he was killed. Before this the golden standard was already close beset, therefore they took a standard from an elephant, set it upon a horse and then furling it began to flee. Then Bhausaheb gave the order to sound the kettle-drums, and so they began to beat them so that people might turn back thinking that they were sounding them for victory, but of those who

had fled not one turned back again. Bhausahab's lips were dry so that he ceased to shout "Strike! Strike!" If any man known to him came before his face he would only give a grunt and make his will known by the movement of his head. The heavens had fallen in upon him. Yet he did not lose heart. Truly it is impossible that there should be any other as courageous as Bhausahab was then. Now only a thousand to twelve hundred men were left standing in that place. All around was utter destruction and men were fleeing everywhere. Close to Bhausahab was Jankoji Shinde and some hundred and fifty men around the elephant that carried Raosaheb's corpse were all that remained. They were encompassed all about and the battle was very fierce. Just as formerly mighty warriors fought from their charits so did Bhausahab perform prodigies of valour, though unhorsed. A little later there was no more to be done. Then Durani and Najibkhan Rohila with ten thousand of their forty thousand horsemen fell upon Bhausahab and there was such a battle as never was and never will be. All around they stood upon every side. Then there was a great trampling of horse and in that who can tell what was the fate of Bhausahab and Jankoji Shinde! The two princes were not seen again by mortal sight. Whether they disappeared or went up into heaven or were taken into the earth, this mystery is not known to the gods themselves, so how may a mere human know?

On the other side all went ill with Malharrao Holkar. At such a time how may one patch the heavens? There was no more remedy for it. Accompanied by twenty-five horsemen he turned aside and quit the field. The elephant with Raosaheb's body and the mare that Bhausahab had ridden were taken by Sujayatdaula.

From *Bhausahabanchi Bakhar*, 18th century

Tr. by Ian Raeside

## Selections

### MAHIPATI

MAHIPATI (Mahīpati, 1715-1790) was a saint-biographer whose contribution is widely acknowledged among the Warkari community. He abandoned the title of Kulkarni to devote himself completely to *Bhakti-Sadhana*. He is said to have had a vision of Tukaram in his old age which led him to compose volumes such as *Bhaktavijay*, *Santalilamrit* and *Bhaktalilamrit*. For his writing he did extensive research on the works done earlier and also took efforts to acquire more information. His works, though full of references to the supernatural, are noted forceful expressions of devotion and his understanding of the Warkari community is thorough.

*i*

The extract here from Chapter 46 of *Bhaktavijay*, throws some light on the liberal views of Eknath.

The day for the worship of ancestors came and Eknath invited the Brahmins saying, "Tomorrow is my ancestors' day. Please come to the feast." Arising early in the morning he had the cooking prepared in his house. Just as soon as one and a half watches of the day had passed he asked the Brahmins to go and bathe. Where Krishna serves in the form of a Brahmin menial how can there be the lack of anything? Garments and gifts of gold were there ready to give to the Brahmins. After bathing, Eknath came back to his home. Going to the roof of his house he dried there the garments. Just then an unnameable (outcaste) and his wife were both sweeping the alley below and suddenly the fragrance of the dainty food came to them. The wife said to her outcaste husband, "I receive delightful fragrance from food, such food as is not obtainable to us, but the fortunate Brahmins will eat it." The outcaste then said to his wife, "Why do you lick your chops in vain? Such dainty food we can never have in all our lives. There is the worship of ancestors in Eknath's house to-day and so they will bury even that which is left on the plates. So not recognizing this you have foolishly cherished such a useless desire. An ox goes to a wedding and even rich men give it fodder to eat; but, my wife, how can there be in our fate that pleasure of dining upon such dainty food?"

As they were talking to one another, their conversation fell upon Eknath's ears. He then descended from the roof and said to his wife, "Two outcastes are sweeping. They desire to eat of the dainty food. Come now and give to them a feast of the food already prepared at our house." The wife said to him, "A great amount of food has been cooked. Invite all the outcastes together with their children. If we give a feast to two only, the others will remain unsatisfied. These two will go and invite the others and they will all come rushing here. So let us invite them all and give them all to eat. God is in all creatures, and so we should make these outcastes happy." Eknath then went outside and invited all the outcastes. Seeing them in the alley he felt intense compassion for them. He served perfumes, rice, flowers that had been prepared to use in the worship of the Brahmins, and Eknath made an offering of them to the outcastes. Placing the leaf-plate before each by the hand of Shudras he served them with the dainty food. He placed before them melted butter, sugar, vegetables and salt.

Knowing certainly that God is in all men, Eknath made the offering to God and said, "Krishna is the enjoyer of this food." Eknath said to them,



"Start now to eat; and all the outcastes great and small, including children, then partook of the dainty food. All ate to their fill. They received such delicious food as they had never seen or heard of. They exclaimed, "Blessed is your action, O Eknath. You have indeed made us feel happy. We belong to the most inferior outcastes. We never had seen such food before. We shall remember you all our lifetime, as the merciful Vaishnava." Eknath served them with whatever dish they desired. All were fully satisfied and to all he gave betel-nut. Every bit of food remaining in the house he gave to them. Then he had his house and pots cleaned. Giving out new materials for cooking he engaged many female cooks and the dainty food which resulted was ten times more than before.

The Brahmins, who were asked to bathe, learned the news that Eknath had feasted the outcastes before them. They said to one another. "Eknath has done a very strange thing. He invited us to the feast of the anniversary of his ancestors, but instead he gave a feast to the unnameables." The Brahmins angrily consulted among themselves and said, "Let no one from to-day take food from this defiled person." All who were learned in the Shastras went to Eknath's house and angrily belaboured him with harsh words. Some said, "You evil-doer, you have violently insulted us. Without having feasted the Brahmins, you wicked man, you honoured the outcastes. Were your ancestors unmentionable that you honoured these lowest of the outcastes, namely those reviled by the Vedas and the Shastras? You are seeking to bring about at once a mixture of castes. You have set about establishing an evil custom, thereby doing away with the duties of Brahmins." Hearing these words of the Brahmins, Eknath joined his hands and humbly pleaded with them, "I have already had prepared another cooking in the house. The fragrance of the first cooking was smelt by the outcastes. How could I have given you that which remained after the feast? So having given to them a feast I immediately had another feast prepared. Forgive me, you compassionate ones, and purify this memorial day." The Brahmins replied, "You have insulted us to-day. The food which is to be offered to fire in great sacrifice, you have thrown it before the crows. You have, as it were, thrown a bottle full of the sacred Bhagirathi water into a latrine; or it has been like taking the jewel ornament of a queen and giving it to a slave; or as if you took the paste of sandalwood of the Maila mountain and rubbed it on a donkey; or as if you had taken the *tulsi* leaf used in the worship of Vishnu and offered it to a mosque; or as if you took nectar and wholly wasted it by throwing it on ashes; so without giving us a feast, you have gladly honoured the outcastes; thus you have done what is wrong and placed a stain upon yourself." Having spoken thus the Brahmins excommunicated Eknath and somewhat concerned he sat in silence.

Krishna, who was in the house as a menial Brahmin and who was also known by another name of Shri Khandya, said to Eknath, "Why are you sad? Your ancestral ceremonies are to be preformed here to-day. Therefore do not be concerned in reference to it. Your ancestors will come speedily to eat the prepared feast. After the feast has been prepared let the leaf-plates be placed for the feast." Eknath now became full of joy, yet was very much astonished. He served many kinds of dainty food, melted butter and sugar. The moment his lips uttered the word "Come" his ancestors came and sat down. After they had been honoured and their feet washed, and after betel-nut, the sandalwood paste and the sacred thread, he gave them gold gifts. The moment Eknath made an offering of food to the supreme Brahma, the ancestors began to eat. Whatever food they had a desire for, they took it and gladly ate. The confidence he placed at the feet of God was seen in the form of ancestors. Eknath was indeed happy when he saw his ancestors. After his ancestors were satisfied with the feast, he gave them water to wash their hands, and after having given the betel-nut and the gifts of money he said to them, "What shall I do with the food that still remains?" They replied, "Dine on it together with your friends." The Brahmins who were standing by the door heard these words and opened the door and came inside to see. There they actually saw the ancestors completing their feast. The moment they were seen, they became invisible. All the Brahmins were astonished at what they saw. The Brahmins then went outside and said amongst one another, "Eknath is not an ordinary man but a direct *avtar* of Vishnu. We have been proud of our rights and have tried to nullify his purpose. But Shri Krishna is helping him and is favourable to him because of his devotion. The moment he falls into any distress, the eaglebannered one comes to his help. He has today caused his ancestors actually to dine with him thereby bringing shame on us." Some said, "We have lost the various kinds of dainty food; as one cannot understand the future, it is fate which is to be blamed. Now let us all go tomorrow and humbly tell Eknath that he should now take penance and remain in his caste. If we say he is already purified, our pride will have gone for naught. By putting a penalty upon Eknath we shall turn him again to a right course of action."

The next day all the Brahmins assembled together on the sandy bank of the river and invited Eknath to come to them. When Eknath came he made these Brahmins a *namaskar*. He said to them, "For what purpose have you, my lords, invited me here?" They replied to him, "Without knowing what you were doing, you have committed a fault. Now take penance and give honour to these rules of the Vedas." Hearing what the Brahmins said Eknath replied, "I absolutely refuse to perform a penance. So long as Shri Krishna is my mother and father, how can I do what is

wrong?" The Brahmins replied, "Act with reason and give honour to our request. Your body will not be purified unless you receive a penance." Then having bathed him in the Godavari they gave Eknath a penance. They placed ashes and cowdung on him and repeated the *mantras* given in the *Vedas*.

From *Bhaktavijaya*, 18th century

Tr. by Justin E. Abbot

*ii*

The following is an extract from *Bhaktalilamtra* (Bhaktalīlāmṛta).

Eknath goes to Alandi

*100*

It now happened at a certain time that Sri Nath was about to go to Alankapuri. He left his faithful disciple, Uddhava, at home, and started with his retinue of followers.

*101*

Influenced by the thought of such good company, a great crowd started with him on this pilgrimage. They journeyed along the road listening the while lovingly to loud songs of praise.

*102*

Arriving at Alankapuri, they rested on the bank of the Indrayani. Here Jnanadeva, appearing to him in a dream by night, said to him.

*103*

"The roots of the Ajana tree have reached my neck. Dig into my tomb and push the root aside."

*104*

Shri Nath did so, and there beheld Jnanadeva. He made a prostrate *namaskar* before him, and pushed aside the root.

105

He then closed up the tomb again, and performed a *kirtan*. Also on the eleventh of the moon there was an all night praise service, participated in by all the pilgrims.

### God Miraculously Provides Food for the Pilgrims

106

At that time Alankapuri was a depopulated town. There was no rice or other food materials to be obtained there. God Pandarinath performed a miraculous thing. Listen, O ye pious *bhaktas*, to what he did.

107

The Husband-of-Rukmini, compassionate to the needy, became a Kanada Lingayat. He erected a booth, and sat there with all the needed articles of food.

108

He would say to the pilgrims, "Take away with you all the articles you need. I do not ask for any money now. I am well acquainted with Eknath."

109

Thus remarking, the Husband-of-Rukmini would measure out all the needed articles of food, wheat, flour, dal, rice, ghee, vegetables and salt.

110

After four days had passed, he suddenly there and then, became invisible, This Merciful-One would not let his servant lack in the very least thing.

111

The pilgrims came immediately to Eknath, and told him that they had bought their materials on credit, but that the merchant was nowhere to be seen.

112

As they thus naively related this story. Eknath understood its secret, inner meaning, and exclaimed, "What has God of the Eagle-Banner wrought. He who protects his *Bhaktas* from mortification!"

113

Thus completing their pilgrimage they started to return home. As they came back near to the sacred city of Pratishtana, Uddhava came forward to welcome them.

114

Also a great crowd of pious inhabitants of the sacred city, both men and women, came to welcome them, and filled with love made their *namaskar* to Shri Nath.

115

All carried aloft eagle banners, emblems, and flags, and sang aloud songs of praise, relating the story of Jnanesvara.

116

The clang of the cymbal, the *vina* and drum swelled in harmony with the acclamations of the crowd. The sound of Brahma was incarnate there. The servants of Hari danced as went along. That day was a blessed, happy day.

117

Thus singing, they returned home. Then they sang *arati*, and reverently waved lights before Shri Hari.

118

On the next day there was a giving of gifts to Brahmans, and a feast of many kinds of dainties was provided for them.

119

With the vida and the generous gifts all were satisfied. Then Eknath, with his own lips, described the greatness of Alankapuri.

### Eknath Corrects the Text of the Jnanesvari

120

It happened one day that Shri Nath, with affection and joy for his task, sat down to correct the text of the book, *Jnanesvari*.

121

Although existing copies had been made with loving care, still mistakes had been made by copyists, until finally the meaning and grammatical relations becoming unintelligible, the book had ceased to be commonly known.

122

It was for this reason that Shri Jnanesvara became an avatar in the form of Eknath at Pratishthana, and corrected the text of the whole book.

123

Then looking with loving eye upon Uddhava, Shri Nath told him the unfamiliar fact that Jnanesvara, with deep insight, had made a Marathi translation of the Gita.

124

And that, "Through the mercy of Janardan I have corrected the text of the book. The pious-minded people should, therefore, assemble together, and hear the book read."

125

Hearing these words from Eknath's lips, Uddhava was greatly delighted, and the Husband-of-Rukmini, in the form of Keshava was one of the attentive listeners.

126

Before these two, Shri Nath constantly read the *Jñanesvari*. But in addition to these there were also present pious men and women who came to listen.

127

Shri Nath would clearly explain the deep meaning of the *Jñanesvari*, so that no question remaining unanswered, the whole became intelligible to all, from child to adult.

128

Every day at the third watch he began to read aloud this work of *Jñanesvar*. Keshava and Uddhava were the two principal listeners, and there was great enthusiasm.

129

When the reading of the book was finished they worshipped Sarasvati, waved auspicious lamps, and distributed sweets.

God in the Form of Keshava asks Permission to Depart

130

And with the ending of the reading of the *Jñanesvari*, the Lord-of-Pandhari, who had been there in the form of Keshava, asked Eknath's permission to depart.

131

"I have spent twelve years happily with you here," he said, "but I am now homesick, and I ask you to give me permission to go away."

132

To this request of the Life-of-the-World, Eknath assented, but added "I hope you will be pleased to let me see you again here."

133

Keshava-in-visible-form listened to this request, and then suddenly became invisible. But the Lord-of-Heaven said to himself, "I must come here again sometime."

134

The thought came into the mind of the Husband-of-Kamala, "Eknath has served me in many ways. I must in some way repay his kindness," This thought pleased God greatly.

135

Thus thinking to himself, the Lord-of-Dwaraka, immediately became invisible. The *bhakta*, Uddhava, now said to Eknath, "I will always remain with you."

136

And so when the *Kirtans* were performed, with love and enthusiasm he would follow in the refrains, keeping time with the cymbals, and thus bringing extraordinary animation to the music.

137

And from the child to the aged, men and women were constant listeners to these lively *kirtans*.

### The Pious Outcaste, Ranya Mahar and his Wife

Now there was in that sacred city a very pious man, an outcaste.

138

This Yogabhrashta in a former birth had been a distinguished Vaishnava. Through some fault he had been born a Mahar, an outcaste.

139

His wife was supremely virtuous. She loved the image of Shri Krishna, and both, performing loving acts of worship, would repeat his names.



140

As Shri Nath performed his nightly *kirtans*, both of them used to come, but sat outside. They listened with fixed attention, lost to all bodily consciousness.

141

When the *kirtans* closed, and the people had left the *wada*, they would bow to Eknath and then go back to their home.

142

And now as to how they used to serve Eknath. They would always sweep the path which he used to use when going to the bank of the Ganga to bathe.

143

And when Shri Nath was taking his bath they were accustomed to look towards him and make him a prostrate *namaskar* from afar, regarding him as Vishnu-in-visible-form.

144

It now happened one day, a Hari day, that Eknath, with great joy, was performing a *kirtan*, and was relating how Shri Krishna showed himself to Arjun in the form of the Universe.

145

As the distinguished Vaishnava was expressing in song that event, he repeated the beautiful verses of Jnanesvara, used in his commentary.

146

At that juncture Ranya Mahar propounded with his own lips this question to Eknath, "When Shri Hari, who pervades all animate and inanimate things, assumed the form of the universe,

147

Where was I, at that time, outcaste as I am now," Shri Nath replied, "You were wholly attached to Krishna."

148

Hearing these nectar words from the lips of Eknath, he became lost in contemplation. His ideas of difference and non-difference passed away. The conception of duality vanished.

149

Whatever animate or inanimate things he now saw, he became one with them. He now knew no longer any differences or colour or caste.

150

He became convinced in his mind that Eknath was the supreme Brahman-in-visible form. Then freeing themselves from all their domestic entanglements, both of them went and took up their abode in the *Kasana*.

151

It was their thought that by doing so, when Shri Nath came there to bathe in the Lakshmi *tirtha*, the opportunity of seeing him would come to them with out effort.

152

It was for this opportunity that they abandoned their own place, and now came to live near the bank of the Gánga river.

#### Ranya Mahar's Wife Wishes to Invite Eknath to Dine

It happened one day that the wife of the Unmentionable said to the Lord of her life,

153

"Eknath is in very truth Pandurang, who has become *sagun* to save the universe, nevertheless my mind has conceived the purpose of inviting him here to eat in our home.

154

If you will go and invite the Swami, I will make the needed preparations." Ranya Mahar listened and replied to his wife, "I will go."

155

Finding Eknath alone, Ranya told him the secret of his heart, "My wife has conceived the purpose," He said, "of serving you at a feast."

156

If you will give me permission, I will make the needed preparations at my home." Recognizing his kindly feelings, Eknath did not refuse.

157

And said, "Through the grace of Janardan, the wish of your heart will be fulfilled." Ranya listened to these assuring words and received from them a sense of peace.

158

He informed his wife of the encouragement Shri Nath had given him. In worldly goods they were exceedingly poor, yet they collected together the materials necessary for a feast.

159

By the side of their door they placed the *tulsi* altar. They washed their garments, and cleaned their vessels. Both of them regularly performed their daily baths, and the names of God were ever on their lips.

160

They laid in a store of wheat, flour, dal, rice, ghee, and vegetables, and fasting on Hari days, they became regular listeners at Eknath's *kirtans*.

161

When there was an all-night Hari praise service, they spent all that time in listening to the *kirtan*. Only when it was dawn would they return to their home.

## Eknath is Invited by Ranya Mahar and his Wife

162

The Unmentionable's wife was an exceedingly pious and virtuous woman. She said to the lord of her life. "Let us now invite the Svami to a feast.

163

"I will do the cooking here at home. Hasten, and sit by the bank of the Ganga, awaiting the coming of Eknath.

164

"When the Svami comes there for his bath, seek an opportunity when he is alone, and very humbly give him our invitation."

165

"I will do so," said Ranya, and at once went and sat down on the bank of the Ganga. Shri Nath soon arrived, and Ranya reverently made him a *namaskar*.

166

Eknath acknowledged his loving *bhakti*. After he was seated for a moment the Unmentionable affectionately addressed him. "I have a special request," he said.

167

"But I am one without caste. I have no right to invite you, and hesitate to do so, yet will you come and take a meal at my house?" and with this he fell at Eknath's feet.

168

To this request Shri Nath replied, "You are a loving Vaishnava *bhakta*. Shri Krishna has seen your sincerity and is pleased.

169

"A Brahman may be thoroughly conversant with the Vedas and Shastras, and yet be without devotion to Shri Hari. Though he may be adorned with the twelve noble qualities, yet an outcaste can be superior to him.

170

"Although he is an outcaste, he may be very acceptable to God." And here Eknath repeated a Sanskrit *shloka* from the Mahabhagavata. (VII,9,10)

A dog-eating outcaste who has made an offering to God of his mind, his words, his actions, his property and his very life, is to be considered far superior to a Brahman, who although gifted with the twelve characteristics of a Brahman, has turned away from the feet of God. The former purifies his whole family; not so the later puffed up with pride.

Eknath Reciting a Shloka to Ranya Excites  
the Anger of the Brahmins

171

Eknath had repeated only this one *shloka* in the presence of the Unmentionable, but there were some Brahmins nearby, who became greatly enraged.

172

Then all the Brahmins came about Eknath, and loudly vociferating, closed around the loving *bhakta*.

173

The chief Brahmins said to Eknath, "That *shloka* was not from the Bhagavata, but from the Vedas. Why did you repeat a *shloka* from it to this unmentionable?

174

"An outcaste has no right to that potent philosophic knowledge. This being so, you have done a very improper thing.

175

"Your deed appears like that of servig dogs with spiced custard, like rubbing sandalwood oil on an ass, or presenting a mirror to a blind man.

176

The Brahmans further said to Eknath, "In repeating that *Shloka* to this outcaste a great sin rests on your head. The performing of a penance is therefore your due."

177

Shri Nath listened to these words of the Brahmans, and placing palm to palm, he made a *namaskar* to them, replying in conciliatory words.

178

"Ranya Mahar", he said, "is a Vaishnava *bhakta*. He is fondly attached to the worship of Shri Hari. He has conquered all the six enemies of the soul. One should not, therefore, call him an outcaste.

179

"When one looks at the character of this Unmentionable, not one good quality is lacking in him. One sees in him all that the Bhagavata religion enjoins.

180

"I am convinced that he has the right to the philosophic knowledge. By his reverent devotion he has made the Supreme Brahma, existing in the form of Shri Hari, subject to him.

181

Seeing his earnest desire I repeated merely a short line. I ask your Greatnesses to forgive me my transgression." With these words, he prostrated himself before them.

182

To this the Brahmins replied, "You are very impudent, you stiffnecked fellow. You have openly preached to one without the right to listen, thus departing from right doing.

183

"If you refuse to perform a penance for removing your fault, we shall excommunicate you." So said all the chief Brahmins.

184

Shri Nath, the Supreme-Brahma-in-visible-form, did not in the least resist. He assented to the demand of the Brahmins, and said, "Prescribe the penance."

185

So saying, he stepped into a deep pool in the river, and remained standing. The Brahmins brought cowdung and ashes and repeated over him a *mantra*.

186

The Unmentionable saw all this and in silence returned to his home. His wife was engaged in cooking. Quickly she enquired of him the result of his errand.

187

"Did you invite Shri Nath?" When she said this he replied, "Ours is broken fortune."

188

"Because Eknath spoke to me, all the Brahmins are enraged. They have made him stand in a pool of the Ganga, and are giving him a penance."

189

"The good we have laid up in a former birth is not sufficient to bring about the service of saints," the wife sobbed with emotion saying. "We might as well give up life."

190

Thus exclaiming, she threw herself on the ground and her tears flowed so copiously that the earth was wet with them.

191

Seeing her in this condition, her husband called her to himself by the motion of his hand, and said, "Eknath is an ocean of mercy. He will not pay disrespect to the poor."

192

"I will go to him again, and give him again our invitation. If he refuses to come, then indeed there is no use in living, and we may then give up our lives."

193

With this determination of mind, he hastened to the bank of the Ganga. He made a prostrate *namaskar* before Eknath, and said, "I ask you to come to-day and eat at my house."

#### Eknath Accepts Ranya's Invitation to Dine

194

Seeing his earnestness, Eknath, who has voluntarily assumed this human body, replied to him, even though there were Brahmans standing near by, "I will come."

195

"As soon as your cooking is ready, I will come, about noon-time." The Unmentionable returned delighted to his home.

196

The Brahmans now murmured among themselves. "He is laying a course of defilement. Through him there will now come about the mixture of castes."



197

Because he repeated the *shloka* to the Unmentionable, we had to give him penance, and now he has accepted the invitation of the Unmentionable and is going to eat at his house. What is it that we can do!"

198

The Brahmans then assembled secretly, and planned among themselves to set spies and catch him in the act (of eating at the Mahar's).

199

The whole circle of Brahmans, therefore, set itself to watching here and there. They made a study of his form (so as to recognize him).

200

Some stood in the lanes, others sat by his door, talking to each other under some pretence or other.

201

Some sat down on the bank of the Ganga river repeating *mantras*, with rosaries in their hands. Others went to the house of the Unmentionable, and concealed themselves near the door.

202

Thus putting aside their usual private business, all these Brahmans turned their attention to spying. But they failed to perceive that Eknath was the *avtar* of Maharaj Vishnu.

203

The Brahmans said to one another, "Let us give no hint to Eknath. The unmentionable will come to call him, and we can then catch him in the very act of eating at his house."

God in Eknath's form Eats at the Mahar's House

204

Now as to Eknath. After he had duly performed divine worship, he had a

reading aloud of the Purana at his house. The sun had now reached the zenith.

205

Uddhava, in the meanwhile, was rendering worshipful service to the Brahmans, and religious mendicants. Having offered holy water and fragrant unguents, he began to serve the various dishes.

206

Turning now to the house of the Unmentionable, after all the cooking had been finished, his wife requested him to hasten and bring Eknath back with him.

207

This *yogabhrashta*, but a true Vaishnava, had smeared the floor, and thoroughly cleaned the house, and with his own hands had beautifully marked the floor with designs with coloured powders.

208

He had provided fragrant unguents, rice, garlands and the materials for worship, and was now waiting expectantly with a heart full of joy.

209

The Unmentionable came to Eknath's door and humbly besought him, "Will the Svami now come with me to eat?" Eknath replied to him.

210

"You go on, and I will follow you quickly." At this the Brahmans began to make signs to one another by the motions of the eye.

211

Now what did God Pandurang do, but take the form of Eknath and appeared at the house of the Unmentionable, to his surprise.

212

He exclaimed to his wife, "Shri Nath has come to our house." She, full of pleasure, reverently made him a *namaskar*.

213

She felt like one, who about to die, drinks the nectar of immortality. She gave him the board seat to sit on, and lovingly washed his feet.

214

Then promptly with loving devotion she touched her own eyelids with her thumb, applying the sandalwood pigment, and placed a garland of *tulsi* around his neck.

215

On his forehead she drew the *tilak* and on it rubbed the fragrant powder. All this the Brahmans, who were sitting as spies, distinctly saw.

216

Some of them remained sitting there, others ran to Eknath's house. Those who had been in the street exclaimed, "Coming by what street did he escape our observation?"

217

One of the Brahmans replied, "He must have changed his guise, and moving stealthily like a thief, escaped our observation, and knowledge."

218

Another said, "He had bewitched our eyes. From early dawn we have been sitting here, closing the street."

219

Those who had been in the Maharwada went to Eknath's house, and lo! there was Eknath on his board seat, with the rosary in his hands.

220

When the Brahmans saw this uncanny sight, they were overcome with astonishment, and informed those in the house of their wonderful tale.

221

"The marvels done by this defiled one," they exclaimed, "are most extraordinary. He is here and he is there; he is in both places." Then they all rushed together to the Maharwada to look.

222

And there sat Eknath on the board seat with all the materials for worship in profusion before him. The Brahmans rushed back and forth, and lo! in both places they saw him.

223

Just as there does not appear the least difference between an object and its reflection, so was it between Pandurang and Eknath. There was no difference whatever.

224

As holy water and common water are two in name, but there is no difference as to their oneness. And who is there who can choose between the sun and its brightness?

225

As the blue of the sky and the sky itself, as the flower and the honey in it, are one, so Eknath and Pandurang in human form were seen to be of the very same shape.

226

That Eknath had become a *sagun avatar* in order to save the world; this, those Brahmans, failing to recognize, were lost in perplexity.

227

This made them exclaim, "How is it that at the same time he is seen here and there in both places ?" Until the third watch they vainly rushed back and forth.

228

But they could see no difference between the two, of less or more. He was seated in both places, the Unmentionable had worshipped Eknath, and was arranging the food in the dishes before him.

229

His wife with affection served Eknath with all kinds of savoury food, regarding God Janardan as the partaker of the food. Eknath then sipped water.

230

Shri Hari, who is hungry for devotion, was fully satisfied. Whatever his taste craved, he would ask for, and received on his plate.

231

In this way the meal passed. She then with love gave him water to cleanse his hands, and making the *vida* with her own hands gave it to him. In doing this she experienced a sense of great satisfaction.

232

The couple then made Eknath a *pradakshina*, and a prostrate *namaskar*, exclaiming, "You have fulfilled our earnest desire. Blessed are you, Mighty-one, Guru-of-the-World.

233

"We were without devotion, without *bhakti*, without intelligence, without caste, but you have fulfilled our earnest desire, and purified us in this present life."

234

Shri Nath reassured them, and then suddenly vanished from their sight. The man and woman then ate what was left on his plate as his gracious gift.

235

The Brahmans, utterly astonished in their minds, went down to the brink of the Ganga to bathe, and then going to Eknath's house watched him there.

236

While these events were taking place (at the Unmentionable's house) Eknath with Uddhava was also eating at his own house. And the Brahmans exclaimed, "We are not able to fathom this defiled man."

237

"We have wearied ourselves rushing back and forth in vain. In both places he is the same." Listen now to what one, with an evil imagination, suggested.

238

"Learning magical *mantras*, he has gained the favour of the king of the demons, and putting this mighty demon forward, he has made this extraordinary miracle to appear."

239

Thus remarking the Brahmans returned to their homes. Mahipati, the true bard of the saints, herewith proclaims, as a public crier, Eknath's great fame.

240

Svasti, This book is the *Shri Bhaktalilamrita*. By merely listening to it one's desires are fulfilled. Listen then to it, ye loving, pious *bhaktas*. This is the nineteenth delightful chapter.

## O Uddhava, Go and Console the People

MADHAVAMUNISHWAR

The following piece is a song by MADHAVAMUNISHWAR (Mādhavamuniśvar, 18th century), in which Krishna is asking Uddhava to go to Gokul as his messenger and console the milkmaids in their separation from their beloved.

O Uddhava, please go and console  
     the people of Gokul.  
 Father Nand and Mother Yashoda  
     might cry themselves to death.  
 Setting aside their household chores  
     they might roam in the jungle forlorn,  
 Might neither eat nor drink  
     but only sorrow after me  
 Who sheltered me since I was born,  
 And cared for me every way they could,  
 And carried me till their shoulders ached.  
 How they exhausted themselves for me!

The children of Gokul would leave  
     their parents to play with me,  
 Would fondly bring unto me  
     the choicest delicacies,  
 And follow me day and night  
     to steel milk and curd;  
 But these bonds I snapped  
 Must have been such an aching pain to them.  
 The moments must seem like ages  
 To them whose love I remember.

The milk-maids desert their husbands and home  
     out of love for me.  
 Cold to the lure of heaven  
     they would be lost in sport with me.  
 Living in the thought of me  
     with eyes fixed in a trance.  
 Not a grain of doubt in mind,  
 They were firm in their resolve.  
 I feel they may have died  
 Of broken hearts.

No sooner you meet them, tell them  
 that I am safe and sound,  
 That I want to know about them;  
 bring me their reply.  
 Tell them how things here are  
 and ask them not to grieve,  
 This task is not for you,  
 But for my sake, go, make haste.  
 So says Madhavamunishwar  
 Of him whom none understands.

*Uddhava, Santavan Kar-ja* 18th century

*Tr.* by Jayant Paranjape

## A Wake-up Song unto Krishna

KRISHNAKESHAVA

The Wake-up Song given below by KRISHNAKESHAVA (Kṛṣṇakeshava, 18th century) is addressed to young Krishna, the cowherd-god. He is asked to lead the cows for grazing.

Wake up Gopal, tend to the cows,  
 Your friends are there waiting for you.

The night is over, the moon has paled;  
 The hermits meditate upon your name,  
 A bright sun is shining upon the eastern hills;  
 The lotuses are blooming in the lakes.

The cows and calves, O Madhav, are calling to you;  
 Wake up, wake up, it's getting late.

O best of men! your mother is waiting for you,  
 Show your bright round face to one and all.  
 Beautiful women perform your worship  
 With burning lamps in golden plates.

Your devotees sing that birth after birth  
 They want nothing better than to serve you.

The poet Krishnakeshava falls at your feet  
 And says, O Shri Hari, O Father, O Mother, wake up.

*Bhupati Shrikrishnachi*, 18th century

*Tr.* by Jayant Paranjape



## A Wake-up Song unto Lord Ganapati

RAMANAND

The following is a devotional song by RAMANAND (18th century). It is addressed to Lord Ganesh. It belongs to the sub-genre of wake-up songs.

Awake, yet devotees, awake!  
 Arise and pray to Gajanan,  
 Lord of Riddhi-Siddhi,  
 Bringer of joys to all.

His body smeared with vermilion  
 A crown adorning his head,  
 His forehead marked with saffron and musk,  
 A glorious garland round his neck,

Rings glowing in his ears  
 like the sun and moon in the sky;  
 His waist girdled with snake-skin  
 He rushes at your call.  
 A golden wrap at his waist,  
 And a bowl of sweets in hand;  
 To him Ramanand turns in prayer,  
 Who is our deliverer in times of crisis.

*Bhupali Ganapatichi*, 18th century

Tr. by Jayant Paranjpe

## The Song of Sita

MOROPANT

The following poem is a narration of the Ramayana episode of the journey into the forest in the words of Sita. It was written by MOROPANT (1729-1794).

Listen to the tale of exile in the forest: says Sita,  
 but, do not take grief to heart. (1)

Taking the wooden sandals with you,  
 you came back from Chitrakoot. (2)

We too left straightaway from there  
 The three of us entered the forest, (3)

With brother-in-law Lakshman behind, and lord Rama—  
my husband—walking ahead  
I felt as though I was at home. (4)

Heat, hunger, thirst would not affect me:  
why should I tell you a lie? (5)

Whenever I lagged behind,  
turning back, they would look for me. (6)

How can I describe that look of Rama, my lord!  
For me, it was a shower of nectar. (7)

On the way, I was taken to the hermitage of Sage Atri.  
I felt as though I was at my parents' home. (8)

Sati Anusuya would do my combing and braiding.  
I was given utmost content and joy. (9)

The sandal-paste she had smeared on my body is wet still.  
The thread of the garland she wove is still unbroken. (10)

Revering the sages we went to the banks of the Godavari  
Where the holy place Panchavati is. (11)

How my brother-in-law rendered such great service to me,  
only the great Lord knows. (12)

There came the wretched Shurpanakha aspiring to be Rama's wife;  
My mind took great fear for her. (13)

Lakshman severed her ears and nose  
—well-versed as he was in the Vedas and the Shastras— (14)

Her brother Khar, got angry  
and came to fight a war. (15)

Fourteen thousand sinful demons, on the battle-field,  
did lord Rama turn into dust. (16)

Shurpanakha with her bleeding, dirty face and nose  
conveyed the account of the clash to Ravan. (17)

Ravan remembered a secret device to avenge;  
The wicked one sent the illusory deer. (18)

I saw the golden-skinned deer studded with jewels  
and in my mind took it for a real one (19)

Fondly, I demanded that it be brought home,  
Not knowing the sorrow it would bring in the wake. (20)

Leaving Lakshman behind to guard me  
My lord Rama set out, taking his bow and arrows. (21)

*Sitagita*, 18th century

Tr. by Pradeep Gopal Deshpande

## Autobiography

NANA PHADNIS

NANA PHADNIS (18th century) was a Finance Minister of the Maratha kingdom. An excerpt from his *Atmacharitra* (Atmacaritra) is given below.

Let me consider what is the semblance of the face of God. It is the emblem of truth, full of animation, and resplendent with its own effulgence. God passes his existence in watchfulness, in sleep, and in contemplation. His watchfulness is apparent throughout all animated nature; his contemplation is displayed in the light of day; his sleep is typified in the stillness of night. He, to whom we attribute these qualities, is *The Onlyone — The Spirit*.

It is he who in the plenitude of his power displays himself in every thing. He is everywhere present at the same moment, moving without feet, seeing without eyes, touching without hands, hearing without ears, pervading all space.

If it be asked from what are we to conclude that the Great Spirit pervades all space, and that it is a single and sole spirit? I reply, that we derive this knowledge from the conviction of our reason, and from an innate consciousness arising out of sympathy. Thus how often does it occur, when men assemble, though sitting at a distance from each other, that they communicate their thoughts by a look or a gesture, just as a mirror reflects an image.

Now it is evident, that if the spirit in those bodies were not the same and identified, this union of sentiment would not occur.

The soul of man partakes of the nature of the spirit of God, and to every human being is allotted a portion of its glory; but, regardless and unmindful of this truth, man relinquishes the contemplation of the greatness of God, and pursues what he considers the apparent advantage which presents itself to him in this world of misery. Such, however, is consistent with human nature. It is *Maya* (illusion or desire) with which he is filled, and which prompts him to action. *Maya* can neither be considered substantial, nor positively illusory, no more than the face of God can be seen or accurately described. *Maya* influences the conduct of man to be selfish, and sometimes to be vicious, but its prevailing tendency is to engender pride. The spirit produced the firmament of heaven, after which air, light, water and earth were made. These five elements we designate by the term *Mahabhut*.

In the midst of these is seated the soul, endued with reason, and surrounded by the five *mahabhuts*, or elements. The soul is eternal; it is unconnected with the perishable body wherein it is placed, but from which is distinct. The human frame is material; it is compounded of the five elements, and is thus rendered capable of partaking of worldly pleasure and of pain. It is calculated merely to receive sensual impressions. It is begotten in shame; it is engendered, and becomes matured in labour; and is liable to destruction, even before it is brought into existence. It is condemned to a mortification of nine months in the womb, is eventually born in pain, and enters a world full of misery and affliction. For a lengthened period it is incapable of assisting itself, or of asking relief; but gradually acquiring size by imbibing aliment, the bones and muscles acquire strength, the blood is nourished, and in the end the infant-form assumes the shape of man.

Of such materials then am I formed.

In my childhood, moreover, I was possessed by ignorance, but through the merit of previous births I had a great desire to worship God and for this I would make little lingas and worship them. I would even steal the gods (from the household shrine) and worship them and for this mother would even beat me, but my inclination was fixed. In my childhood while studying, because of the punishments received from my mother and father, I harboured ill in my mind through ignorance and even wished ill upon them. Later in the tenth year I was married. Whatever obstacles befell me I overcame. After the age of eleven or twelve the emotions of lust began to arise in my body and because of this and a little because of frequenting bad company an inclination to sin was born in me and I began to waste my seed. At this time I fell from my horse and my condition was very serious. For two days I had no consciousness but in spite of this Govind in his mercy made me well.

Afterwards in my fifteenth year my father died. God allowed me to perform his obsequies but even in this one occasion I committed the fault of a sinful glance. I realised that the idle shedding of my seed was both sin and the destruction of my body and I resolved to give it up, but the lusts of youth are unequalled in creating a sinful mind. Later, in order that I might carry out my ancestral service and duty and knowing that the Peshwa gave me his favour as if I were his own son, I went to Shrirangapatan in the region of Karnataka but each day I was as in a dream. Then on returning home I became addicted to pleasure through sheer ignorance once again. The spirit of sin cannot entirely be expelled. Then I considered within myself that the nature of my father's father was to be religious and truthful and most devoutly attached to the service of gods and brahmans, holy in all things and eschewing all forbidden *karma*, yet despite all this why should my mind turn greatly towards sin? I decided that it was an influence on my mother's side which was very loose-living. I might resolve with my mind but I could not remain firm. Heredity was too strong.

I went to Tok to perform the great Rudra vow and adopted a discipline of constant devotions, but can one achieve asceticism by mortifying the flesh alone? And where can one look in order that other men's women should not enter into one's mind? Together with my mother and my wife I went with Bhau into Hindusthan with the intention of bathing in the divine Bhagirathi which flows in all three worlds and of making the triple pilgrimage so that thereby my heart should be purified. At that time my mind was entirely without passions, for the reason that I was somewhat afflicted in body and therefore my mind was turned towards asceticism and the continual worship and contemplation of God. I was also afflicted with fever but my mind was untroubled and I continued onwards with devotion towards my mother. Bathing in the great river Narmada I gave myself single-mindedly to contemplation. From that day onwards my ascetic feelings and the purity of my heart continually increased. Bhau's affection for me was very particular and when I was sorely troubled with dysentery and lacked the power to rise, with great flux and much weakness, His Highness caused the army to halt even though they had already struck camp. At that time God made me healthy once more. Then by stages I went to the banks of the Charmanvati. There an eclipse took place. Time was passed there in contemplation while my soul became purified by bathing and making gifts.

Afterwards I went near to Gaughat on the banks of the Jumna, daughter of the sun, and having bathed and worshipped there after two days went to the holy place of Muttra, the city of release. After performing the *shraddha* ceremony there with penances and shaving of the head I went on to that

place called Brindaban where sported the blessed Radha-Krishna who is Brahma entire. There by the Kaliya pool is the Kadamba tree upon which the blessed one sat and Jumna and beneath them I bathed and made water-offerings and afterwards putting on *gopichandan* paste and a rosary of *tulsi* beads and continually reflecting upon God within Brindaban I took *darshan* of the images of the blessed one in the temples of Atalbihari, Kunjabihari, Balbihari, Radhakishor and Govindji. There at noon time when Kunjabihari sleeps upon his swinging cot, although the doors of the shrine were shut they used to pull the cord of the swing from without. And I drew this with my very own hand and gave to the blessed lord the mortal joy of swinging. From there I went to Shrangarvat where the blessed one adorned Radha and I took *darshan* of that banyan and then proceeded to Bamsivat, that is the place where the Lord played his bamboo flute, and saw that banyan also. And from there to the places called Sevaban and Kunjban, where the grove seemed as if the blessed one was still sporting there. All these trees are umbrella-shaped and low. With branches touching the ground, and even the thorny trees have no thorns. Then being overjoyed from seeing all this I went to the banks of the Jumna in the sands where the Lord sported as a child. Brahma and all the gods desire the smallest grains of dust that his lotus feet have touched in order to adore him by placing them on their heads, and going there I rolled in the sand and placed the grains upon my head. From there I went to Jnanagujari where mighty saints and teachers and ascetics who are devoted to the Lord come and sit at the third hour of the evening and listen to the recitation of the puranas and sing the tales and names of the blessed one. Taking *darshan* of them for upwards of two hours my mind became greatly calmed and afterwards I went to the banks of the Jumna at Dhir Samir and performing the evening rites concentrated my mind fixedly on the blessed lord Shri Samba Sadashiv. In this way I passed three or four days. It is due to the virtue of many births that the sight of such a place as Brindaban was given to me and because of this and through seeing the images of the Lord and of his devotees my eyes were made holy. I walked there with my feet and by this my feet were sanctified. With my hands I was able to make salutations there and by this my hands were made holy. With my mouth I recited his names and by this my mouth became holy. With my ears I heard the story of the blessed one and through this my ears achieved holiness. Through bathing my whole body became holy. In that Brindaban the ascetics are seated in every place beneath the trees, wrapped in contemplation with the most single-minded intent—some eating only leaves, some taking nothing but water, some taking milk, some eating only whatever prepared food was brought to them, and through the sight of such as these I attained in some measure to the joy

and virtue of mingling with the holy ones. One ascetic from among these showed me favour and told me a *mantra* of the name of God that I might continually repeat it. Considering this as if it were given to me by God himself, I was much contented to make gifts to all, according to my power.

Afterwards I went to Delhi. There by the orders of His Highness I took *darshan* of the Emperor. He spoke to me very graciously and gave me his blessing and I took the garments with which he presented me. It gave me pleasure to think that this favour was itself a part of God's favour towards me. After that suddenly, while I was seated with His Highness, there was an earthquake, but I was able to remain concentrating mind on God. Also in Delhi I bought and examined pictures and other objects in which no sin resides.

After this the Muslim from the north with hostile intent descended upon the far bank of the Jumna with three quarters of a lakh of soldiers; but the Jumna was greatly in flood and because of this both sides were halted. Afterwards with great valour His Highness took Kunjpur. I too was in that battle. God preserved me. Then at this point the Muslim crossed to the near side. His Highness advanced against him with his army and we encountered. I was young then. His Highness had great wisdom, but by the power of fate and what was doomed to come his wisdom was clouded. Those who were close to him such as my uncle Balavantrao, Nana Purandare and others became estranged and those who were strangers like Bhavanishankar and Shahanavajkhan became close. He put faith in their words and became of that we abandoned our own method of war and adopted the Muslim way. The warfare continued between the armies. Each day the enemy's shot passed over the tents. My mother and my wife were afraid. What would come of it all? At that time I entreated my mother and said that I could not pray that God might care for us. Thereafter my uncle fell in battle and that very day the whole army might have been destroyed, but night fell and therefore it saved. In these two months many men and beasts died. There was a great dearth of food and everywhere an evil smell—such troubles did I witness. Afterwards my uncle's wife accompanied him to the pyre. My mother experienced much grief. I made the resolve that whatever was to happen was unavoidable and therefore one should entertain no doubts. Then when the major battle was to take place next day, the plan was made the day before that if we were defeated His Highness's family and our own should not fall into the hands of the enemy but we ourselves should kill them. His Highness made this arrangement for them, having determined that he himself would not survive (if defeated). On the following day we made ready and one hour after dawn the exchange of cannon shots began. His

Highness was very wise, bold, valiant and skilled at war. His pride was very great, yet he had made excellent disposition of the army and other matters. Finally all good order close to the standard was lost and we came up against the main force of the enemy. I was close to His Highness, thinking from time to time upon God, when a bullet struck Vishvasrao. He fell and His Highness placed him upon an elephant and himself stood his ground. Then the Pathan foot-soldiers came in amongst us and the fighting was hand to hand. On the left flank great captains, even the greatest, were first to flee. On the right flank also Holkar and Shinde departed and the standard also went. There were two or three hundred infantry (left) and His Highness had disappeared. Then God gave me wisdom and I turned back. Earlier in the battle Bapujipant had advised me that I should go back. Then I had replied to him that it was not right to abandon His Highness at such a time, but afterwards it happened as I have said. A lac of soldiers and amongst them many noble men but not one remained close to him at that time! For many days they had eaten his food and he had favoured them like his sons. So long as times were good they swore that they would give their lives before a hair of his head should be harmed, but in this contrary time that God had created who then was his companion? They were all fair-weather friends. One who had feasted them so generously, given them garments and jewels and lands, and yet his end was such that none knew where his body lay. Everything was lost.

I came to Panipat on horseback in the first hour of the evening. I had no knowledge at all of the paths of that country, but there by God's grace to show me the way stood Ramjipant. He straight way said that I should abandon clothes and horse; and therefore I threw everything away and sat there wearing only a loin-cloth. When night fell we set out but, three or four times within the space of a *kos* the Muslim soldiers laid hand on us and searched us; and each time they cut down between ten and twenty of our number. That I still lived was entirely by God's will. But Ramajipant and Bapujipant still remained, and so we went for ten or twelve *kos* to the westward. Then those same enemies came and gravely wounded Ramajipant and Bapujipant and others, and they fell. I was left alone and went amongst the grass. God it was who protected me by that grass! He cast enchantment upon them so that when all were killed I, who was close to them, was not killed and was allowed to go into that grass which was far off. Then when they had gone I went on again, and after two more *kos* I saw others coming after me. Then again I went and hid in the grass, but they came close and began to drag me out. At that time God put it into the mind of one of the elders amongst them to say, "why should you kill him?" So then they went away; and after that upon me,



who at Panipat was very weak, who was afflicted by dysentery and could scarcely take food—upon such a one as me that ocean of mercy which is Samba Sadashiv took pity; and with my feeble body, which had not felt the heat of the sun and which had no experience of walking, I came sixteen or seventeen kos without food or water. At noon feeling great hunger I tried to eat some *bor* leaves that I found, but they would not pass my lips. In this way at evening when I came outside a village an ascetic brought me some millet flour. I made bread of it and ate. It tasted like ambrosia. Afterwards I slept and at dawn went on, thinking on God and repeating the thousand names of Ganga. Then I came to a village where was a merchant who took me to his house. There was a brahman dining there and I encountered Yashvantrao from the remount section who cooked my meal for me. We heard the news that enemy horse-men had come into the village whereupon the merchant said that he would deliver us to Jainagar by carriage. We set out in a cart but I saw that he was deceiving us. When I realized this I left the cart and set out again on foot. With me were two or three brahmans and two Marathas, and in this way we travelled ten or twelve kos. Thus we went on foot for seven days and always God provided some kind of food so that all those with me could eat, and we came to Rewari. The fugitives from the army had gone that way. In that town were four brothers called Balerao. Having heard my name they had been asking, "What is he like? How does his face appear?" enquiring every detail about me. Then learning that I was coming along behind they continually kept watch on the road. Therefore when I came they recognised me outside Rewari and began to enquire how I was. I had determined not to give my name, but when they began to name me to my face and I saw that there was no trickery in their words and they wanted only to provide for me and do my pleasure, then I spoke my name and they took me and those with me to their house and provided the very best of food. After we had eaten they gave us clothes. After that Ramjidas Joshi who was an important man in Rewari heard the news and placed us in his house. For seven days he provided the best of food and clothes. After this it was our desire to go to Dig and Bharatpur but he said, "I will deliver you there with a carriage and a decent retinue. Afterwards when a marriage party was setting out he gave us a cart and good food for the journey in order to accompany it. We set out and on the way met Krishnabhat Vaidya who said that Viroji Baravkar had brought my wife away safely, that she was in the house of Naropant Gokhale at Jigani and that gentleman had provided her with clothes and all she needed. Upon our going there he gave us a luxurious feast with *kshira* and I was much pleased. Then with a second cart for my wife we set out from there and came to Dig. There was Purushottam Mahadeo who had

come directly from Panipat and was living in the quarters of the excise agent; As soon as he heard he led us to his house, and there I remained about a month together with my wife. I was always very hungry and he provided us with good food and clothes and other things. From there I made much search for my mother, but a servant of our house who was with her said that she had fallen from her horse, been injured and died. This was the only information that I had.

Later with a palanquin and horses I came through Dholpur to Gwalior where was the whole army which had fled — Parvatibai, Nana Purandare, Malharji Holkar and all. From my very heart I desired to go to holy Kashi and live there always. I had fully learned what joy there is in all the objects of the senses in the worldly life. However the fate to which one is born is too powerful. After I reached that place everybody advised me, saying that I should go back to the Desh once at least, that I ought to carry out the death-rites for my mother and how could this and various other things be done if I went to Kashi, and what would Kashi itself be like now that Panipat had befallen. With all this in my mind I started out together with the army. When His Highness Nanasaheb heard the news of Panipat he remembered me often and said to Guruji, 'He is so weak in body, how can he have escaped ?' Yet I survived this great calamity through his blessing and by God's mercy.

After I took *darshan* of His Highness Nanasaheb at Burhanpur and saw that his body had become very wasted. His temper was very strange. Many were constantly losing honour and reputation. But to me he spoke with compassion and love and asked for my news. I told him and remained with him three or four days. Their Highness Gopikabai and Narayanarao caught small-pox and therefore they stayed together on the bank of the Narmada I learned that their minds were not favourably disposed towards each other. Through the contrariness of time things happen which should not happen. Afterwards knowing that any change might take place in his favour to me I begged leave that I might go ahead to Tok. He ordered me to go and I came and resided at Tok. Then His Highness came there after me and I saw him again. Even though his temper was very difficult I asked for a shaligram and with great condescension he gave orders that I might take whatever I wanted from that holy place. I took an image of Sitaram. One day it was the fast of Pradosh and on that same day was the anniversary of the death of his elder Highness and therefore I was summoned to dine. I sent my request to be excused saying that it was my Pradosh, but the reply came that nevertheless I should come. Thereupon I asked again through Guruji at the time when His Highness was going to the temple, but the order came that it was the *shraddha* of Raosaheb and therefore I must most certainly come. Therefore I went. After the *shraddha*

Brahmans had been fed, the princes sat down to eat. On one side was placed His Highness Madhavrao and on the other myself, and we were served by his second wife. She was even corrected in her manner of serving. Of course it was the mother who served her son.

After this I requested His Highness that I felt that I should compose my mind by remaining a little time on the banks of the Godavari, and he gave the order that I might remain for some time. His Highness struck camp and went to Poona, but his body was very weak. It was the final hour. Letters came saying that I should come quickly. I was nourished by his food and should be near him at the end, therefore I started to come to Poona but before reaching Parner I heard the news that he had died. Letters came from Dadasaheb saying that I should most certainly come. Afterwards I came to Poona and hearing that His Highness had died while close to Shri Devdeveshvar I was very grieved. Afterwards Dada also treated me with love and favour. He later took His Highness Madhavraosaheb to Satara to be given the robes of Peshwa, and he took me also with him. He urged me insistently that I should come to the palace with them to receive the robes, but I beseeched him saying, "What need is there of us? Our master is yourself alone." Therefore I did not go. Afterwards His Highness obtained leave of his kin and set out to return to Poona. I was with him. As we were going along the way a Gardi fell upon a Kunbi woman in a field beside us to take her by force in sight of all, when a horseman slew him with his spear. Then did I see the condition that lust induces. Afterwards His Highness passed across the Nira but we remained in the town of Shirwal in order that we might cross next day. The river began to rise and so we entered into a boat. When the boat came into mid-stream it was carried away. The boatman said that they could do nothing. Then a great rock came near. If the boat had struck it was our last moment. Then I thought upon God, whereupon two men leapt out and drew the boat to shore. Thus we were protected by Great Vishnu who lies upon the ocean of milk. Then I came to Poona and His Highness through his favour at that time ordered me to devote my mind to my duties.

From *Atmacharitra*, 18th century

Tr. by Ian Raeside

## Ghanashyam, Sundara Shridhara

HONAJI BALA

HONAJI SHILARKHANE and BALA KARANJKAR often composed poetry together, hence the name Honaji Bala (Honaji Bāla, 1764-1844). Honaji is more well-known. His

poetry gave the status and dignity of classical music to *lavanee* singing, because he based his tunes on classical *ragas*. This revolutionised *lavanee* singing. Honaji's writing includes *lavanees*, *Powadas* and narratives based on the Puranas. Despite the religious tone of the example produced here, much of his creation tended toward "profane" love. Honaji was murdered, being involved in professional jealousy among Shahirs.

"Ghanashyam, Sundara, Shridhara" is not only one of the best known of Honaji's *lavanees*, but perhaps the single most known *Lavane*, because of its nature as well as tune, it is known and sung also as "Bhupali". Its subject is Yashoda's loving attempts to awaken her son Krishna early in the morning. Yashoda pleads, cajoles, tempts Krishna, and finally calls out to him in a phrase that epitomises "motherly love".

Ghanashyam<sup>1</sup>, Sweetheart, Shridhara,  
 Aruna<sup>2</sup> has risen  
 Wake up, arise, Vanamali, the sun  
 tops the eastern horizon.  
 At dusk-time, all in unison,  
 birds gather in the trees.  
 As Aruna rises, gone are these,  
 winging their way, to feed.  
 Ablutions over, purificatory rites,  
 ascetics attend to penance,  
 Having risen at daybreak, saffron-clad  
 mendicants tend to their observance.  
 Performing their sprinkling, dug-plaster,  
 Pitchers on hip the milkmaids,  
 Proceed towards Yamuna water. Mukunda,  
 come, eat your curd-rice.  
 The bumble-bee seeks freedom from the lotus;  
 When the east washes her face, darkness dies.  
 Wake up, arise, Govinda, darling son of Nanda,  
 Lave your visage, take your feed of milk and bread. (1)

Ghanashyam, Sweetheart, Shridhara. . . .

In every house, mending the wicks  
 of perpetual lamps

- 
1. Ghanashyam, Shridhara, Vanamali, Madhusudana, Hrishiksha, Jagatpala and Hari refer to Krishna.
  2. The Sun's charioteer.

The milkmaids fondly sing their songs,  
 busily go from house to house.  
 They commence household chores,  
 draw floor designs in yards.  
 O Spring of Joy, dawn has broken,  
 arise, arise, the night is gone.  
 Take up the pail, milk the cows—  
 hark, the cows are mooing.  
 At the door the cowherds stand  
 calling out to you.

Place these flower garlands round your neck  
 and the strings of abrus berries,  
 Take in hand your dainty cane  
 and your dewlap blanket dark.  
 My darling son, O Madhusudana,  
 Harishiksha, Jagatpala.

The calves are lowing, Hari,  
 eager, straining to suckle.

(2)

Ghanashyam, Sweetheart, Shridhara. . . .

Morning bath over, the milkmaids  
 bedeck themselves with jewels,  
 Adorning themselves with vermilion,  
 begin the chore of churning.  
 With longing in their hearts, brahmins  
 chant the roll of divine names.  
 Having offered oblations, they  
 perform divine worship.  
 Disciplined Vishna bestow  
 worship on Vishnu,  
 Smarta folk are engrossed  
 in Shiva's worship,  
 And Shaktas venerate Shakti.  
 Living in their ashram, the hermits,  
 Permeated with Brahma,  
 Lose themselves in contemplation  
 Soon as Aruna has risen, well before dawn—  
 The full disc of the sun appears,  
 Now, Hari, Nanda will come to know how long  
 you have overslept!

(3)

Ghanashyam, Sweetheart, Shridhara.

Pupils come to the feet of their  
     guru, to acquire knowledge,  
 In the morning, teachers instruct  
     their disciples study.  
 Officiating priests pour, look,  
     sacrifices into the fire-pot;  
 With illumination from the sun  
     all ten directions light up, pure.  
 O my dark little calf, darling  
     Krishna, arise, arise,  
 Balram is ready, so are all  
     the cows, go take them to the pasture.  
 O swan of the manas<sup>1</sup> of supplicants.  
 O bee in the lily-hearts of the milkmaids,

Murari<sup>2</sup>, lotus in hand, Padmanabha, Shriranga,  
     O destroyer of Shakta Lord of all,  
     O Hari, of lofty puissance. . .

On your face the rare brilliance  
 of more than a million suns,  
 Honaji Bala ever worships in his  
 heart the garland of your names.

(4)

Ghanashyam, Sundara, Shridhara,  
     Aruna has risen  
 Wake up, arise, Vanamali, the sun  
     tops the eastern horizon.

*Ghanashyam, Sundara, Shridhara*, 18th-19th century

*Tr.* by Shudhakar  
 Marathe and  
 Padmakar Dadegaonkar

## The Beauty Occupied My heart

RAM-JOSHI

RAM-JOSHI (Rām Joṣi, 1762-1812) is a link between Panditi poetry and Shahiri poetry. He is well known for his scholarly accomplishment, his poetic ability and rollicking sensuous life-style. Born in a traditional and learned Brahmin home, Ram-Joshi

1. Mind or Manasarovar lake.

2. Murari, Padmanabha, Shriranga, destroyer of Shakata-all refer to Krishna.

felt most at home in the Shahiri troupes, therefore his family broke off with him. He acquired vast wealth by means of his traditional *katha* and *kirtana*, and spent it on his addictions and indulgences.

His poem "Sundara Manamadhi Biarali" (The Beauty Occupied My Heart) is a *lavanees* that presents a Marathi beauty in conventional Sanskritised as well as current local forms.

The beauty filled my heart, tarried not a moment,  
entering the mansion, pearls in her parted hair;  
My desire, unrequited, subsideth again  
for she returneth not. She, mate, whose is she!

Like a golden champa bud that  
no sinner's eye should see;  
she cannot be easily won.  
Oh, her delicate, comely form,  
up in the *navkhani*<sup>1</sup> she stands  
alone, a mine of virtues—  
Like a younger love-goddess  
lion-waisted, with a  
necklace around her throat.  
The bloom of her body,  
her youth overflowing  
like the love-god's foil swaying;  
On her ankles, strands  
of clustered bells; whose wife is she?  
which baron her lord?  
The complement of to-rings, the studded  
spot on forehead, set in my heart  
yet unaccosted her blinding blaze!  
The Surati *bulakh*<sup>2</sup> in her nose  
outshines the stars that  
do languish before her.  
she walks the elephant gait,  
loose, her plait reveals her curls,  
And her vermilion brocade. . .  
With her, who needs riches, chattel!  
If you but sing of the lovely mole  
on her cheek, you taste her wares,  
enjoy possession, slake all desire!

1. A large well-to-do-home.

2. A nasal ringh, peculiar to Surat region.

She is the new slender crescent—  
beyond comprehension—all  
other mere slovenly crones. (1)

The beauty filled my heart. . .

Lovely image of the love-god, a nectar  
sweet face, in amorous wars  
the wicked edge of a sword,  
A supple doll in Kamasutra,  
in her eyes, the love-god himself;  
quite adroit in Kokshastra;  
Peacocks and parakeets feel  
shame, become speechless—  
in her throat are vina strings. . . .  
Like a flash in a dark cloud, she amidst her  
tresses, to hold day and night in the heart—  
truly fathomless, par excellence—  
In her plaited hair are *mood*<sup>1</sup>  
and *rakhadi*; she stands on the  
balcony, with *paan*-painted lips;  
A ruby-blossom decorates her ear,  
entrances my mind, seems  
the very essence of the world;  
Not an old stinting scent-vendor, she,  
But reveals generously her wares,  
Her navel that excels the conch,  
A grain superior even to an *apsara*!<sup>2</sup>  
She seems the foil of the love-god,  
how can a carbine compare,  
how to adjudge her golden self?  
Do listen to what I tell you,  
her youthfulness had dispelled  
many a man's trance, opium-held! (2)

The beauty filled my heart. . .

Her fancied armlet newmade,  
perfect fit to her arm.  
the gem weighed to a nicety.

1. Ornaments woman the back of the head.  
2. Courtesan of heaven



Below her fine-folded waist  
     a pearl-set golden band  
     whose value only the love-god knows  
 On each of her nails red henna  
     and a delicate ruby in her ring  
     that shines like pale moonlight  
 Gold chains on her ankles beneath  
     spill sweet tinkles on the ground  
     when this image of the love-god moves—  
 As you call her a beauty,  
     go on, go find out her *maher*<sup>1</sup>  
     or where is her own home—  
 There, see, her maid stands by her;  
     climb up, accost her, question  
     her right upon the balcony.  
 Such a rare woman, like a rice-grain  
     among chaff, found by fortune,  
     who has thus entrapped you. . . .  
         Tripping like this,  
         The youth who fulfils  
         His fanciful dream—  
         This grievous unsettling hurt—  
 Yet if you desist, give up now, you will wander still  
     uselessly, but where will you encounter  
     such surpassing beauty?

Thus says this poet, well-known to all,  
     who outshines all other poets,  
     mere glow-worms.

(3)

The beauty occupied my heart, tarried not a moment,  
 entering the mansion, pearls in her parted hair;  
 My desire, unrequited, subsides again  
 for she returns not. Say, mate, whose is she!

*Sundara Manamadhi Bharali*, 18th-19th century

Tr. by Sudhakar Marathe  
 . and Padmakar  
 Dadegaonkar

## When Will You Meet Me Now, Darling

PRABHAKAR

PRABHAKAR (Prabhākar Janārdan Datar, 1769-1843) is particularly well-known for his *powadas*. In his *lavanees* he often crosses the bounds of decency in description; in the days of the Peshwas. Gangu-Haibati had become rather famous via his Shahiri troupe. Having entered this troupe, Prabhakar started composing and his poems became so popular that others in the troupes were obliged to sing his composition.

"Kadhi ga bhetasil ata" ("When Will You Meet Me Now, Darling?") presents the feelings of a soldier who has to leave his beloved for a military conquest. The poet also obviously exploits the double entendre of "conquest".

When will you meet me now, darling,  
friend of my bosom?  
At the peak of cruel summer, conquests  
are tough, you know, dear love!

Watching your luxuriant youth  
myself blazes day and night,  
Now, an expedition is my lot  
how will my time ever pass?  
As your memory rises in my heart  
of hearts, passion bestirs itself,

I cannot prop up my courage; as I  
try, it dissolves right away.  
Which friend can I find now, who  
will satisfy me each moment?  
Remembering your talents, sweet,  
my heart is all in a ferment.  
Whoever will now embrace me decked  
and arrayed in jewels and raiment?

(1)

At the peak of cruel summer, conquests  
are tough, you know, dear love?

A jewel like you lives on,  
and yet is lost to me.  
The merit of all my rebirths, now,  
inopportune thing, deserts me.  
That image of you I drew, filled  
ever with feeling colour.

It is now proven, certain, the five-  
 fold self must remain unfulfilled,  
 Even after one has embraced, tight,  
 a young woman in close solitude.  
 Whenever you stand before my eyes, dear,  
 you still seem to disappear!

• (2)

At the peak of cruel summer, conquests  
 are tough, you know, dear love?  
 The throat tightens, chokes up—  
 martial conquests away are tough—  
 When there's none to wipe the sweat off my face,  
 the memory of home will come to me.  
 Blasts of hot sunlight will arrive,  
 my mount will also irk me.  
 Whoever will bring the news to you, my  
 dear, from moment to moment, of me?  
 Who will then the inner tale  
 convey, with lip close to lip?  
 Each moment will call forth tears  
 as if the sea itself were howling.  
 I'll then wander over the earth, every nook  
 and cranny, searching for a slaking mirage.

(3)

At the peak of cruel summer, conquests  
 are tough, you know, dear love!

At every step consoling her, at last  
 in the third hour he embarks.  
 Sobbing, wiping her eyes, swaying behind  
 she follows—  
 "Stand awhile, speak to me, dear love, do  
 not plunge a poisoned dagger in my heart;  
 Waves of passion engulf me: say a word  
 that gratifies, before you leave"—  
 Gangu-Haibati<sup>1</sup> would say, hold on fast  
 to the bloom of your youthful love,  
 Soon, soon to Punyanagari<sup>2</sup> will return  
 the Lord all-conquering, triumphant.

1. Gangu-Haibati and Mahadev are names of other poets of the same school.  
 2. The presumed earlier name of Pune.

The versatile poet Mahadev intimidates my ear, but  
Prabhakar's own poetic shafts pierce to the heart, my dear!  
When will you meet me now, darling.  
friend of my bosom?  
At the peak of cruel summer, conquests  
are tough, you know, dear love!

*Kadhi Ga Bhetashila Ata*, 18th-19th century

Tr. by Sudhakar Marathe and  
Padmakar  
Dadegaonkar

## Medieval Nepali Literature

### The Great King Malaya Varma

ACHARYA VISHNUPADA

ACHARYA VISHNUPADA (Ācārya Viṣṇupada) or Vishnudasa (?-1393), a court chronologer of the Raskotian kings of Nepal is regarded as the first Nepali poet. His long prosaic chronicle of the Bamma (Varmā) dynasty *Badai Raja Malaya Bamma* (Baḍā Rājā Malaya Bamma) is a plain poetical piece on the achievements of Malaya Varma. Although an encomium in its nature, it helps to confirm the fact that Nepali poetry has emerged with heroic rather than devotional sentiments.

The people's king Malaya Varma  
Made his sword glitter in the air  
Made his sword glitter on the land  
The first king, the great king Malaya Varma  
Enlightened the palace of Khadachakra.

The Manasarovara and Haridvara  
He conjoined in his land.  
There came the door-keepers,  
There came the fort-keepers,  
Made the Manasarovara flow through his land  
And wiped his sword in the Alakananda,  
And wiped his sword in the Bhagirathi,  
The king Malaya Varma then sat on the throne.

Seated on the Delhi throne for one and a half day  
He revised the rules,  
Going to Jodhpur, the regime he changed  
The King Malaya Varma then sat on the throne.

Then the king had a vision of Badri Narayana and Haridvara  
Slaying seven hundred Suyals and seven hundred Budans  
He made the long ridge a solid shield  
And amassed a good fortune  
The king Malaya Varma then sat on the throne.

Going to the east he defeated China  
Going to the south he defeated Bengal  
And flashed his sword in Sirmaura  
The King Malaya Varma then sat on the throne.

Then the king conquered Ruhelkhanda,  
Uttar Kasi and Kedarnath (?)  
And gold in tributes came from Tibet  
The king Malaya Varma then sat on the throne.

Then the great king Malaya Varma  
Suffered a lot in the Liglig fort  
And reaching there in Kathmandu  
Offered a mace to Pashupati  
And camped in a flower garden  
Encircled by mace-carriers  
The king Malaya Varma then sat on the throne.

Then the king invaded Dan  
He slew the English, Moghals and Turks  
And brought he changes in Doti Raj  
Going to Garwal he revised the tithe  
Going to Guguche he changed the rule  
And summoned all the kings therein.  
The Kumau king offered coconuts, the Doti king logs  
The Sirali king presented fowls, the Chatyan king an umbrella  
The Salvan king tendered horses, the Bajhang king a gown  
The Pokhar king proffered coins, the Dangal king a ladle  
And along with his courtiers.  
The Baijanathi king threw a feast  
He wiped his sword in the Budiganga  
The king Malaya Varma then sat on the throne.

Then the king Malaya Varma  
Opened a market at Khadachakra  
And raised a long boundary wall  
And fenced the temple of Khocheranath  
And the stewards and sentinels  
The cavaliers and the charioteers  
All attending from Dullu country  
Kindled earthen-lamps in the temple  
The worship went on for two and a half years  
They lighted the lamps in the central place

Black pepper came from Maharashtra  
 And chillies from Ghodasain  
 Oil sufficed even for swimming  
 Thus *ashtami* was observed at Lamathada  
 The king Malaya Varma then sat on the throne  
 The king was thus coronated in the Khadachakra palace.

*Badai Raja Malaya Bamma*, c. 14th century

Tr. by Gokul Sinha

## Blessing

RAGHUNATH BHAT

The poem *Ashis* (Asis, 1774) by RAGHUNATH BHAT (Raghunāth Bhāt, 18th century) constitutes the earliest Nepali heroic poem. Here the bard, Bhat, first invokes the war-goddesses and then offers his benedictory wishes to his king, who is on his military campaign.

O horrible-mouthed one, roaring with a thundering sound,  
 Delirious with blood-thirst, sharp fleeting foremost,  
 O fair-haired one, having a triumphal garland in hand  
 And a wreath of headless trunks donning the breast,

Clapping for a fearful fighting, dancing out of tune  
 Begemmed with a goblin's eyes and raising greasy hands,  
 Bestower of fearlessness and defender of the devotee  
 May the mighty Mahakali give you a quarter for aye!

Kali, Gorakh, Vairavi and Mahishamardini evermore  
 May the blessings of these four be with you for your victory!

*Ashis*, 18th century

Tr. by Gokul Sinha

## Selections

PRITHVINARAYAN SAHA

PRITHVINARAYAN SAHA (Prithvinārāyan Sāha, 1722-1774), founder-king of neo-Nepal, was a shrewd politician as well as a good writer. Some maxims were dictated by him to a scribe in December 1774, just a month before his death, and long afterwards they were published under the title of *Divyopadesha* (Divyopadesa). It has two sections, the first deals with the historical narration of Gorkha campaigns, while the second consists of a series of policy pronouncements on a variety of topics, such as trade and commerce, internal and external policies, administration

and so on. A number of letters, specially concerning political stratagems and addressed to various allies and contemporaries, and two poems in *Sadhukkadi* language are also there to his credit. The letters may be considered as an early form of political literature.

A few of his maxims and three of his letters are given below:

1

Divine Precepts

As it goes, the old man dies, the speech shifts. Told in front of you all, you may convey it to your progeny and they to theirs. This way this kingdom shall subsist...

Besides, this kingdom is like a yam between two boulders. Keep a close relation with the king of China. Also keep good relations with the king of the Southern Sea; he is very cunning. He has kept India suppressed. He is at present in the plains. Should India unite, it may become difficult for him and he will surely come hither in search of forts. Fortify the fragile tracts and keep the routes restricted. One day this may prove a power. Do not go to cut down, but cut down if one comes. So more can be cut at the Cure Pass, and treasures can be had too for five to seven generations. Shri Gangaji will be our boundary...

Do not permit the traders of the plains to come up further than Godprasad. If they come into our kingdom, they will make paupers of our people. Wearing hand-woven clothes, we managed to control three cities of Nepal and nine lakhs of Kirats and built a Hindu state. Ban the use of foreign cloth. Show some sample to those who know weaving within the kingdom, and train them to weave cloth. This saves the cash from going outside. Export the indigenous herbs and earn foreign currency. Earn money, it makes the subjects healthy and thereby the palace strong. The royal treasure is but the subjects...

Besides, I always apprehend one thing and that is the Munger or Mogal land of India is nearby. There are fallen and fancy women. They mire the man inside a fretted room with their songs, beatings of drum and playing of sitar. Songs and music have a great attraction and wealth flows too. The secrecy of a country is also exposed by them and the enemy will betray. So nobody shall practise music, neither shall they be allowed to come up to the hills. And promptly say good-bye to *ragu*, so that it will not be able to understand the secret of the country. For one's recreation it is all the same to see the classical dances of the Newars starting from three cities of Nepal. If you pay something for it, it shall remain within the country. This way, one's country remains happy...



## 2

## Letters to Ramakrishna Kuwar

*i*

Svastishri Sarvopamayogya Rajabharasamartha Shri Ramakriahna Kuwarkeshu Ashishpurvaka Patramidam. I'm well; hope you're in good health. Rest, the news is fine here. Further, when Kalu Pandey was slain in the Kirtipur war, I was disheartened that I shall never get victory over the three cities of Nepal. But you got it by your wisdom and by the strength of your sword. For this, giving an honorarium of half of the state even falls short. I grant you the surroundings of Simbhu and Dhulikhel as a usufruct to your descendants. I condole the loss of your brother in the war of Timam. Now, the trust is in you to march upon the Kirats. Iti miti Asvina vadi 5 roj 4 mukam Kantipur subham.

*ii*

Svastishri.

Besides, you have written that so many enemies coming from Majhuwa, Kulum, Mahadingla were slain, so many fled and so many wounded. It is fine to learn. We had sent you earlier 21 pots of gunpowder and five thousand bullets. This time we are sending 20 pots of gunpowder, 6825 bullets, 45 tolas steel, 750 pieces of stones, 900 sheets of paper. Dispense with it. Miti Magha vadi 5 roj 1 mukam Kantipur subham.

*iii*

Svastishri. . . .

Besides, it is learnt from your letter that four to five hundred of Kirats were slain. You've done very well. I'm very much pleased with you. In the campaigns of Nepal and Kirats, your labour is superior to other generals. Felicitating you vigour, I'm happy to send you 22 pairs of raiments; wear them. Other officials are also supplied with them, distribute as per the name-list. 25 guns have been sent, hope it will do. Miti Phalguna vadi 9 roj (?) mukam Kantipur subham.

## Friendly Advice and Winning of Friends

BHANUDATTA

Nepali fiction-writing begins with BHANUDATTA's (Bhānudatta 18th century) *Hitopadesha-Mitralabha* (Hitopadesha-Mitralābha). Hitopadesha is a trend-setter in Sanskrit itself and its follow-up in Nepali is quite natural. Appraising the common taste, what Bhanudatta gave in translation has become the historical base of Nepali fiction. His competence in prose-writing is evident from the fact that within a couple of centuries an elegant style of story-writing was evolved in Nepali.

Shri Ganesaya Namah: The task of all gentlemen be fulfilled by the blessing of gifts from Dhurjati or Maharudra. The crescent moon, like a white bubble of River Ganga, is being decorated over the hair of Maharudra and remains lustrous. By listening to this Hitopadesha one can understand Sanskrit speech, become smart to participate in debating, and acquire knowledge of ethics. Those learned people of this world will never be old; thinking that, for everlasting value one should concentrate on learning, and try for earning wealth.

Think that Death is over our head to kill us any time; so do good deeds at the earliest. The greatest wealth in this world is learning because one's learning cannot be taken away by the king; those who think of fixing the price cannot do it. It can never be destroyed. That is why no greater wealth is there than learning. The same way as a river takes away all the wastages to the inaccessible ocean, learning leads a man to the king. Thereafter, the fruit of fortune may be achieved.

Two kinds of learning are famous in this world, one is military science; the other is knowledge of scriptures or scientific treatise. Between these two kinds of learning the heroism of the former may decrease in old age and may become ridiculous in the society. The second kind of learning people will adore for the whole life. That is why the learning of scriptures or scientific treatise is the greatest. Learned people are known as humble men. Deserving people are known by their humble manners; deserving people earn wealth. Do good deeds with that wealth. With good deeds one can be happy here in this world and also in the other world. Anything that is kept in an earthen pot will never be impure as a boy being taught in boyhood will never be ignorant. That is why we teach ethics to children through depicting different stories.

Hitopadesha has been prepared with stories from many books including Panchatantra, like Mitralabha, Suhrudbheda, Vighraha, Sandhi, etc.

The city of Patna is situated on the banks of river Bhagirathi, a tributary of the Ganga. A king, Sudarshana by name, full of royal grandeur and

power was there in that city. The king happened to learn two *shlokas* while performing rituals "give up all doubts of the mind".

Give up all doubts of the mind.  
 Scriptures are the eyes of all who see unseen objects.  
 Those who don't have such scriptures are called blind-folded.  
 Pride of youth, boast of wealth  
 Dirty politics and indiscretion:  
 If any of these four is possessed by a person,  
 That will be a calamity.  
 Better not talk about a person  
 Who possesses all the four.

After learning these two stanzas King Sudarshana thought that all his sons were fools and had not read the scriptures and wondered how to discipline them. He thought: "What is the use of such sons who are not learned and devout. Like an eye which has no use but is only a burden to a man. It is said: only the birth of those sons who bring glory to the lineage is a real birth in a real sense. He who is not reborn in this world after death is like the cycling of the earthen pot by the potter, but if he is a learned son, he glorifies the whole of his lineage like moonlight on a dark night.

Sudarshana, the king, after thinking thus, invited all the scholars in the assembly and said: "O learned persons! listen to me, you are all great scholars among the learned community, can anyone among you teach my sons the scriptures and make them live a decent life, like a rebirth to them? If you polish brass with gold dust, it will shine like jewels; likewise, in the company of learned people, foolish man can be a gentleman. It is said that in the company of lowborn people, one's mind becomes mean, in the company of the middle class people one's mind becomes intermediary, and in the company of great people one's mind becomes broad. That is why I thought that my sons would be disciplined persons in the company of all you learned people."

After hearing such words from the king, Vishnu Sharma, the Pandit learned in all the scriptures such as Brhaspati, requested the king: "O king! why cannot a person of royal birth be taught? No fruits will come from the bad deeds done by an unworthy person because even with great efforts in teaching a crane never learns. Any deed, if we do it properly, never goes in vain. There are other reasons too, those sons of royal birth will never be unworthy because in the mine of emerald jewels, brass is never found. Hence, I will make all your sons experts and masters in all scriptures within a month."

Having heard such words from Vishnu Sharma the king became happy and he humbly said: "O Pandit, if the learned people consecrate a stone, that will be an idol. Like the insect that sits on the flowers and on the heads of great people, the lowborn in the company of the great people become great. The metals in the eastern region become shining when the rays of the rising sun fall on them; in the same way in the company of decent people the low-born become great. Hence, I depend wholly upon you to give proper courses to all my sons."

After saying this the king called all his sons and handed them over to Vishnu Sharma. Thereafter, Pandit Vishnu Sharma took all the princes to the top floor of the palace and started narrating interesting stories. He said to them: "O princes, the learned people pass their days by listening to poetics, the foolish people pass their days indulging in gambling, joking or by sleeping. Thereafter, to make you all happy I shall tell you wonderful stories of crows and tortoises."

From *Hitopadesha-Mitralabha*, 18th century

Tr. by Haren Allay

## A Dialogue Between Lakshmi and Dharma

RAMABHADRA PADHYA REGMI

RAMABHADRA PADHYA REGMI (Rāmabhadra Pādhyā Regmī, 18th century) is the author of the Sanskrit work *Prashastiratham*. His *Lakshmi-Dharma Samvada* (Lakshmi-Dharma Samvāda) is most probably translated into Nepali from his Sanskrit work of the same title. Even Bhanubhakta Acharya might have gone through this work and got inspiration to compose his *Badhushiksha*, an oft-discussed topic in modern women's circles.

Where is truth there lives Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth.

Where lives Goddess of Wealth, there lives Lord Vishnu.

Where lives Lord Vishnu, there flourishes Dharma.

Where there is Dharma, there is victory.

Dharma says: "O Goddess of Wealth, all people worship you in the world but why don't you go to every house? Some people are very rich, some people are very poor. what are the reasons for this? Why do you do this mistake? Why do you show this partiality?"

The Goddess of Wealth says: "O Dharma! I shall tell you in detail, please listen to me. I live in the hands of womenfolk. I live with womenfolk. I shall tell you the bad habits of womenfolk. Listen, those women who are impolite, harsh, quarrelsome, insulting, over-sleepy and lazy are bad. Listen, those women who put spit and snot on the wall, who do not pick

up spilt and fallen things, who do not care for pure and impure food, who mishandle utensils, who are without good conduct and who do not bathe, who keep clothes carelessly, who sit showing their hair in public, who go to bed with wet feet, are all of bad character.

"Now, I shall tell you about bad eating habits; please listen. She who without serving food to her family and her husband eats secretly, who does not feel the taste while eating, the voracious eater, I never stay in the house of such a woman. Only devils live in such a house, they eat themselves. If such a woman earns property by working hard day and night, all earnings of such a house will be taken away by the devils. As water in a copper pot evaporates, the property of such a house disappears, is away by the devils."

Dharma says: "O Goddess of Wealth, if you have stolen anything in your previous birth, this can be witnessed in this birth. Please listen! The curse of stealing gold and copper will be boils and skin diseases; by stealing brass one will be born as an ox; by stealing cotton, white-spotted leprosy will spread on one's body; by grabbing land one will be affected by waterphobia; by stealing books, one will be deaf and dumb; one who slanders gods and teachers will remain ever feeble; by stealing food one will be poor; by stealing metals, one will be childless. If people of upper castes and warrior castes plough land, they will be slaves for eight births and only then get salvation. . . ."

In the Saka year 1716 corresponding to Vikram Samvat 1851 on the 12th day, in the month of March and April at 4 p.m. at this auspicious hour, with a view to preparing a book I wrote what I found and viewed; learned people, please do not blame me. This written by Ramabhadrapadhyaya. Ram, Ram, Ram. . . . Here ends this gracefully.

From *Lakshmi-Dharma Samvada*, 18th century

Tr. by Haren Allay

## A Bunch of Humour

SHAKTIBALLAVA ARYAL

SHAKTIBALLAVA ARYAL (Śaktiballava Aryāl, 18th century) was a court scholar who chiefly concentrated on Sanskrit literature. His knowledge of Sanskrit poetics must have promoted classical metres in Nepali verse. But he himself wrote only two four-line verses in Nepali. Nonetheless, he is most remembered for his play that earned him the title of "the first Nepali playwright". He wrote two Sanskrit plays *Jayaratnākar Nataka* (Jayaratnākar Nātaka) and *Hasyakadamba* (Hāsyakadamba). The latter was rendered into Nepali by the author himself.

A specimen from the first scene is given below:

Everything is prepared. The artists get ready with necessary costumes and perfumes. After that, going to the stage the singers, dancers, actors and all collectively sing *nandi* chorus. There is no need for detail now. After *nandi*, one of the artists called Sutradhara (impresario) comes to front of the stage and addressing His Majesty Ranabahadur Saha, the king of Nepal, a country like a mark on the forehead of the world, who had graced the occasion with his princely presence, speaks: "Hail Your Highness!" and bows down.

Then the Sutradhara, giving his ear to the sky, hears something and speaks:

"Aha! How to live here without my loving actress!"

He looks at the screen from where the actors enter the stage and calls out:

"O deer-eyed dancer! Today while giving ear to the sky I heard the nice story of a king named Pratapasena, a leader among the kings of this earth. Therefore, on the basis of the same story, let us all have a play. Prepare the stage with curtains. All the artists with their instruments come on this stage. O lotus-eyed! O sweet ogler! Favourite of the love-god! embellished with sandal, musk and other perfumes, having two rounded breasts! O deer-eyed! O dear! Come over here, soon."

Hearing these words of the Sutradhara, a *nati* artiste named Kuranganayana enters the stage and speaks:

"O Aryaputra! Whose assembly is this?"

Sutradhara: It is the assembly of one who is full of fame and fortune, who is terrible to the kings of the world because of his tightened bows and mighty arrows, and he is none but the all-powerful king Ranabahadur Saha, the son of Pratap Saha, the son of Prithvinarayan Saha, the lord of Nepal.

Nati: O my lord! How is it! Why are you dragging a serf like me over here?

Sutradhara: (Laughing) What else does a woman know who is confined to the kitchen or lag in cosmetics! They only worry for what is and what is not in the household, crack a joke or play a prank with their husbands, that is all. They don't know who is miser or rich and who is foolish or wise. O deer-eyed woman! You need not feel ashamed. Why? Because, it is no shame for the pundits to read the Puranas, for the ideal kings to rule their state, for the noble wives to wash their husband's feet, for the merchants to sell their goods, for the beggars to beg and for the dancers and courtesans to sing and dance.

Nati: O Lord! You reminded me, I remember (moving around the Sutradhara and laughing) there is a town called Kinjalkpur, one hundred yojanas away from here, where there is a king named Dhaval Pratap Simha. My maternal home is also there. Once my father Jayapal used to describe the fame and valour of Nepalesvara Ranabahadur Saha to my mother Kaumudi. Now you too are describing the same. Ah! I am blessed! Blessed am I!

Sutradhara: O dear! How did your father come to know the good name of Nepalesvara Ranabahadur Saha?

Nati: O prudent one! Listen to me. The sound of cymbal is heard upto a distance of one yojana, the sound of a thunderbolt upto ten yojanas but the fame and name of a charitable person reach the three worlds. Lakshmi, the daughter of the ocean, sits by the side of a generous person. The uncommon deeds of such a person spread roaring all over.

Sutradhara: (Looking towards the green room) O tumtum-players! flute-players! Sarangi-players! Come to this august assembly. (They enter).

Nati: O thoroughbred! Which poet's play is being performed? Out of the nine *rasas* which one does their play have?

Sutradhara: (Wondering) O weaker-vessel! Don't you know even this? Fie, shame on you. There are many respectable pundits in this city of Nepal. Among them there is one whose writings are far sweeter than those of others. Similarly, some are fine in poesy, some are physicians, some are astrologers who, like fowls, live just for food, some are logicians, some *tantrics*. O my better-half! But I don't like them. Therefore, we have to detail here the lusciousness of the learned poet Shaktiballava. What is the use of studying poetics and other ancillary literature? Poetry rejoices like a dancer in front of him whose base is Krishna. Among the nine *rasas*, *hasyarasa* or humour being the best, it is better to have an example of it. Over and above, it is the spring season. Women are now plucking the *shirish* blossoms. Trees are rife with flowers. Black bees are humming around the groves and cuckoos are cooing. Birds are fluttering in the sky. *Ashoka* trees are blooming. O deer-eyed lady! It is the spring festival!

From *Hasyakadarība*, 18th century

Tr. by Gokul Sinha

## Rhymes on the Bull

RADHABALLAVA ARYAL

*Sandhyako Kavitta* (Sāndhyāko Kavitta) is a poem by RADHABALLAVA ARYAL (Rādhāballava Aryāl, 18th century). Bull being the vehicle of Lord Shiva, a lot has

been written on this subject in Nepali at all times, in all modes. One of the rulers, who was very fond of tauromachy, inspired a number of rhymesters to compose plucky verses. Not less than six poems are found written by known and unknown bards. The one given below is the oldest known. It is a long poem of one hundred and seventy lines, of which only the first ten lines are reproduced here.

Shri Ganapatyaya namah  
 Swelling bodies, strong and hard  
 Bellowing sensually roving in the grove  
 Bully the brave is a terrible fight.  
 Hoary-haired, blustering aloud,  
 Like the rumbling cloud  
 Breaks the mounds, drifts the dirt  
 Covering stars and moon.  
 Dauntless sons of bovine fight so.  
 In such combat as waves do rise

Bound their bodies, looking so gruesome  
 Waging a war against the one  
 Who belongs to none but the same stock,  
 Fighting deadly with all trick and flam  
 Just to delight the assembled human folk  
 And to excite the love-god rife in them. . .

From *Sandhyako Kavitta*, 18th century

Tr. by Gokul Sinha

## The Story of the Ten Princes

ANONYMOUS

*Dandi's Dashakumaracharita* is a famous work of fiction in Sanskrit. Writers in modern languages have not failed to admire it by rendering it in their respective tongues. There are two translations in Nepali; both are anonymous. The first of the two extant Nepali renderings is partially given here which has well attempted to keep up the *Dandinah padalalityam* in Nepali as well. Like that of the original, its language is also sweet and simple, lucid and larkish. The piece is an exemplary prose work of the period.

Among the best cities in Magadh is the one called Pushpapur; all the other cities seem petty before its beauty. King Rajhansa, handsome like the god of love, as strong as the shining, mid-day sun, removing the miseries caused by enemies with his own power, eliminating the troubles of all the intellectual Brahmins with the gifts from the ritual of worship every day, ruling over the whole earth upto the oceans, spreading in all directions full praise for his good deeds, like the scent of jasmine flower,



white like the moon, listening to the continuous singing of divine singers in the beautiful garden of Indra, the king of the gods, and having long limbs like the mountain Mandara at the churning of the ocean-like armies of the enemy. He had a wife named Basumati who was expert in all arts and was of an endearing manner. Staying in Pushpapur, the king of Magadh used to reign over the earth like his own wife.

The king had three faithful and traditionalist ministers namely, Dharmapala, Padmodbhava and Sitavarma. Among them Sitavarma had two sons, Sumati and Satyavarma; Padmodbhava had two sons, Susruta and Ratnodbhava; and Dharmapala had three sons, Sumantra, Sumitra and Kampala. Among them religious-minded Satyavarma, thinking that his world is meaningless set out for a distant province on pilgrimage. Worldly and materialistic, Kampala, ignoring the order of his father and his brothers, also decided to go out to distant provinces. Due to his skill in business, Ratnodbhava decided to cross the ocean for business. And the remaining four sons of the ministers decided to stay on at home obeying their fathers.

The great king Rajhansa, contemplating one day to fight a battle with Mansara, the king of Malwa, set out from Pushpapur taking with him the elephant-army, the cavalry, the animal carts and the big line of infantry soldiers. Mansara, the king, also taking with him many elephants and infantry soldiers, advanced towards him. While advancing this way, the entire area was overcast by dust and with the running of animal carts, cavalry and soldiers it seemed as if angels came from heaven and were sprinkling red powder on the newly-wed couples on the occasion. With the sounds of drum-beat all the directions became deaf. Many soldiers were killed with arms and weapons. In this way the battle was fought between the two kings.

In this battle, Rajhansa, the king of Magadh, made Mansara, the king of Malwa, a prisoner of war, but king Rajhansa was benevolent, so he made Mansara king of the same country. Thereafter, king Rajhansa desirous of a son as the heir to the throne, started meditating and worshipping God, the Creator. After some time passed, the queen, Basumati, dreamt one dawn that God came before her to hand over the fruits of the tree of wishfulfilment. And in course of time she became pregnant. The king also, inviting all the courtiers, observed the first ceremony of the pregnancy.

One day, when the king with all the friends, ministers and the royal priests were sitting in all grandeur in the assembly hall, the watchman brought an ascetic before the king and stood with folded hands. The king asked the ascetic whether he came there from the distant place as a spy in disguise. The ascetic replied, "O Lord! visiting in disguise the cities of the

kingdom of Mansara, I have come here knowing all the secrets of that country. You know what it is? The king Mansara after being defeated by you and in disgrace, despair, disheartened, worshipped Lord Shiva, and making Him satisfied by his worship he succeeded in getting a mace, the killer of the brave, and after getting it he thought that there was none more powerful and brave than him and he is thinking of using this mace against you. Know yourself the rest O Lord!"

Despite the request of the ministers that the battle should not be fought with King Mansara because he had been blessed by God, King Rajhansa decided to fight the battle, ignoring the words of his ministers, thinking that to fight was the duty of the warrior class. Having decided to fight the battle, King Mansara with the help of the mace gifted by Lord Shiva and keeping ahead of all the soldiers, entered Magadha Kingdom.

From *Dashakumaracharita*, 18th century

Tr. by Haren Allay

## Panta Quintet

GUMANI PANTA

*Lokraj Panta* (Lokrāj Pantā, 1790-1847), a native of Almora, Kumaun, and usually known by his pen-name Gumani, was a shooting star in the Nepali literary firmament. Once a subject of the Gorkha Kingdom, he has left a few short verses in Nepali to deserve a place in its history. The poems of Panta are usually regarded as heroic. But he is a harbinger of devotional poems also. Some Ramayana themes are found for the first time in his compositions. Both sorts of verses are given here.

### 1

Ever bearing the burden of taxes, O God,  
Not a single hair is left on the scalp,  
Even though none is leaving your kingdom  
Thanks to the Gorkha king *iti badati Gumani*.

### 2

Hark, O king Dasaratha! I make a prayer  
I bow down at your lotus feet for ever;  
I'm greatly scared of this worldly river  
Instruct me how to cross it over.

## 3

The daughter-in-law of the great king Dasaratha  
 The daughter of the all-wise King Janaka  
 Is grief-stricken in the confinement of Ravana  
 O Rama, O Lakshmana, O father and mother mine!

## 4

Let the people worship Shiva with cymbals and drums;  
 Let the others adore Ganesha with prayers and songs  
 Some others may offer their faith at Bhavani's feet  
*Dhanyatmatuladhamaniha ramate rame Gumani kavih.*

## 5

I deserved the abode of Indra, albeit on earth laid me down  
 God made this highland for me raising it from below  
 Fathoming my feelings the *kafals* became red with wrath  
 Turned some other trees to blue, hoary grey with shame.

*Panta Panchaka*, 18th-19th century

Tr. by Gokul Sinha

## Royal Duties

### LALITATRIPURA SUNDARI

LALITATRIPURA SUNDARI (Lalitatripura Sundarī, 1790-1830) appears to be a lone female writer in the literary scene of this period. She was a widow queen of Giranayuddhavikram Saha, and the regent of the young prince, Rajendravikram. She translated *Rajadharma*, the duties of a king, just to train her son in the statecraft. The language and style of Lalita is mediocre. She died in 1830 at the age of thirty-eight or forty.

Sage Vaishampayana says to King Janamejaya: "O Lord Janamejaya! after giving away gifts by their own hands to all the friends, the Pancha (Five) Pandavas, Bidur, Dhrtarashtra and all the women-folk of the Bharata dynasty, were observing the six months, camping on the banks of River Ganga for a month. During that time many great people came to see them, such as scholars, learned young people, Vyasji, Naradji, Devalarshi, Kanvarshi with their disciples and the learned scholars of Vedas, Brahmins, sages, hermits of repute in all the Vedas. Seeing them coming, king Yudhishtira offered worship and respect to all with all rituals and gave

seats to them at the royal place. Those hermits and sages accepted the respect offered by King Yudhishtira and sat on the bank of River Ganga as per seniority. Seeing King Yudhishtira in grief all the hermits and sages consoled him.

At the same time Narada, after consulting and getting suggestions from Vyasa and other sages, said to King Yudhishtira: "O Lord Yudhishtira with your own might and the grace of Lord Krishna, you won the whole world with noble actions. This war was dangerous for the whole world and you have survived it and you have performed the duty of a warrior; are you happy or not? You have destroyed all your enemies; have you made your friends happy or not? After achieving this glory, have you freed yourself from grief or not?" Hearing these words of Narada, King Yudhishtira told him: "O Lord! by the grace of Lord Krishna and the grace of the Brahmins and with the skill and power of Bhima and Arjuna, I have conquered this world; my kingdom now spreads over the whole world. Even then due to temptation I destroyed my whole dynasty, for which I am feeling very sad. After Abhimanyu, son of Subhadra, the five sons of Draupadi, and all such sons are killed, what for is it to reign in this world? O Lord! while remembering these sons, I thought in my mind that it would have been better to lose the war than win it."

From *Rajadharma*, 18th-19th century

Tr. by Haren Allay

## Mahabharata: Gada Parva

VIJAYANANDA

A great many writers of the later period have tried their acumen in rewriting the classical epics. Among the earliest known, VIJAYANANDA's *Gada Parva* has survived the moths. It is a bulky book, yet not fully published, containing more than two hundred leaves in MSS. Nothing is known about the author's life and his other works. The language of *Gada Parva* is more religious than literary. It is neither fine nor poor.

*Shri Ganeshayanamah. Shri Saradayi namah. Shri Gurave namah. Shri Krishnaya namah. Shri Bhimasenaya namah.*

King Dhritarashtra, after having listened to all the details of the Shalya Parva, again orders Sanjaya to explain all the details of the Gada Parva. "O, Sanjaya! after all our army was killed by the sons of Pandu in the battlefield, what bravery was shown by the rest? What did Kritavarma, Kripacharya, Ashvatthama, the son of brave Drönacharya, and Duryodhana, the man of little knowledge, do at that time?

Listening to this question of King Dhritarashtra, Sanjay said: "O King Dhritarashtra! the fort of the royal warriors after the remaining women

and children fled from there, became empty and the three great warriors became restless. Hearing the shouts of applause of the victorious Pandavas, seeing the broken articles in the tents and going to search for king Duryodhana in the evening, those three, Kritavarma, Ashvatthama and Kripacharya, did not desire to stay on in the battlefield. Those three left towards the pond where Duryodhana was hiding. King Yudhishtira also, accompanying all his devout brothers and desiring to kill Duryodhana, started searching for him, but could not locate him. King Duryodhana, taking his mace with him by the power of his learning, was seated underneath the water in water-meditation.

The Pandavas also, along with their tired soldiers, rested in their tents. Knowing that the Pandavas, who left the battlefield, were resting, Kripacharya and the other three reached that pond where Duryodhana was sitting. They told the king, who was sleeping in the pond, "Taking three of us, please fight with King Yudhishtira, this is not the sleeping time; please get up. If you achieve victory, you would be king; if not, you would be in heaven. You have killed many soldiers of the Pandavas, the rest of them are all wounded and injured. Your bravery and speed will be unbearable to them. We will help. Do not be disheartened; please get up."

Hearing such words from all the three of them, King Duryodhana said: "O brave heroes! After all the brave persons have died on the battlefield, you are still alive; I am fortunate to see you all. Although many of them died in the battle of the Kauravas and the Pandavas, you are the best heroes alive; I feel very happy.

"Now we need rest because we are tired; let us not do anything now; only then we can win over the Pandavas. You are all tired now, and I am myself tired due to the wounds inflicted. O brave heroes! The armies of the Pandavas are rejoicing and excited, hence I have no desire to fight with them. You are all restless to fight with the Pandavas, it is no wonder. You have all tried hard to win the battle but no one can win over death and defeat. You take rest here tonight. I can fight on the battlefield accompanying you all tomorrow. There is no doubt."

The detailed discussions that occurred among King Duryodhana, Kripacharya, Ashvatthama and Kritavarma were narrated to King Dhritarashtra by Sanjay in this way: "After this was said by Duryodhana and listened to by the others, Ashvatthama told the frustrated King Duryodhana: O Duryodhana, please get up! Good fortune will be yours. We will win over our enemies on the battlefield. O Lord! all the fire worshippers, meditators, truthful ones, purified with the Vedas, hospitable ones, animal sacrificers, pond-builders, irrigators, temple-builders, food-givers, worshippers, I have vowed today to kill. If I do not kill the en-

emies on the battlefield, before the passing of tonight, before sunrise, may my respectable words and the good deeds of my sacrifice not remain. O Lord! without killing the Panchalas I will not put off my amulet. O Lord! I tell you this truth, please listen to it."

From *Mahabharata: Gada Parva*, 19th century

Tr. by Haren Alley

## The Song of Govinda

HINAVYAKARANI VIDYAPATI

Nepali *Gita-Govinda* (Gita-Govinda) is a prose translation of the poetic work of Jayadeva by HINAVYAKARANI VIDYAPATI. There are a few other poetical works to the credit of Vidyapati. His writings install him in the forefront of *ritivadi* poets in Nepali. Unlike the original, the prose style of Nepali *Gita-Govinda* is circumlocutive and tough. Though tough, it retains the cadence of the original.

Offering greetings and salutations to Lord Krishna, sportive with Radha in rapt romantic mood somewhere in a lonesome place on the banks of River Yamuna, wishing all living beings be protected, love be to Krishna, the hearts of the devotees be delighted, all sins be absolved, the poet named Jayadeva composed the work called *Gita-Govinda* full of songs.

Radha is the chief among all the womenfolk of Gopinis. Madhava, Lord Krishna, is Narayana. With a desire to eliminate the sorrows of the world, both Lord Krishna and Radha are incarnated as human beings like Uma and Shankara. They roam about on the banks of the River Yamuna in a romantic mood. Groves and bushes along the avenue seem like apartments of a palace where lascivious people and pairs make merry. Having seen Krishna playing amorously here and there in the groves and bushes, Nandji, the chief among the cowherds, fearing for his son, told Radha: "O Radha! Balkrishna may be afraid of this darkness in the jungle. Take him home." Hearing Nandji's words, Radha said, wondering, "Oh, what fear during the day time?" Hearing her Nandji said, "Oh! when the cloud covers the sun and darkness falls in and around the bushes of the forest or even if there is no darkness, the young child may get frightened, therefore take him to his mother Yashoda."

By the grace of Goddess Saraswati the book titled, *Gita-Govinda* was easily written by the poet Jayadeva because in his mind Goddess Saraswati herself has housed as tutelary deity with diverse feats. Or, he is like a *chakravarti* or emperor among the retainers of Lakshmi seated in the lotus. Or, like the king witnessing the art of dance performed by Padmawati. Again, Radha is Lakshmi, Vasudeva is the son of Vasudeva, the remover of the world's misery, the killer of demons like Kamsa and others, the saviour of the devout disciples, born as the eighth incarnation from the

womb of Devaki in human form to protect the world and to love Radha, the performer of the *rasalila*, the actor of varieties of fun and frolic. All sorts of his activities are just a sport. O devoted ones! If you all feel happy hearing the sacred song of Jayadeva, please listen to it. Just remembering Hari absolves sins. Remembering Hari now like that, listen to the four-foot rhymed song, the best among the sixty-four fine arts, an esplanade of orgasm, that is very pleasant, very amorous, very supple, very decent, very fine.

Up till now there is no poet who can criticise the lyrical verses of Jayadeva, the one blessed by Saraswati. Only for the use of soft ditties is Umpatidhara a poet. But he is wrong in the use of numbers. So Jayadeva is abler. Similarly, the poet called Sarana is shrewd in extempore reasoning only; Acharya Govardhan is an expert in romantic writing only. Likewise poets Dhoyi, Kshamapati, Lakshmana Sena, Shrutidhara and others are all fine only in particular fields. But the lyrical poems of Jayadeva are fair, fine, elegant, beautiful and pristine, which can easily be grasped just by hearing. Unable to find flaws in his style, all admire Jayadeva and marvel at his ability.

O piscine Keshava! assuming the body of fish you have delivered the Vedas from the bottom of the sea easily during the great deluge. You created Brahma out of your navel and handed over the Vedas for the creation, which is the basic text to decide what is to be done and what is not to be done. Therefore the Vedas are like a boat that helps people cross the worldly ocean. O Lord! You are all-powerful: You can do and undo: You are the supreme of all. Victory to You! O Lord! May You be able to liberate the people bonded in Your snare of Maya. O Lord!

O turtle-bodied Kesava! Assuming the form of a tortoise you uplifted the world on Your back. Again on Your mighty back You are upholding mountains and forests, a chain of creatures of flesh and blood, this heavy world You are preserving. O turtle-bodied! among all You are the ablest! O God!

O You who have taken the boar's body! Assuming the form of a boar, You have freed this world. While upholding the earth on the white tusk, it looked like a spot on the moon, O Lord!

O Impersonator Narasimha! Your lotus-hands bore dreadful sharp nails in their fingers, peculiar and unknown, that tore the bee-black body of the demon Hiranyakashyipu.

O Narasimha Keshava! O Vamanarupa Keshava: In the disguise of a dwarf as a beggar you crushed the pride of mighty Baliraja. Brahma watered your foot when stretched to heaven. The very libation of water is the Ganga that makes the people burning in sin cool. O able Lord! . . .

## Hymns of the Milkmaids

## INDIRAS

Very little is known of INDIRAS (1827-?) save his date of birth and only surviving poem *Gopika-Stuti* (Gopikā-Stuti). It is a translation of the first half of the X canto of *Shrimadbhagavata* and comes to nineteen verses. It retains the original Sanskrit metre but the vocabulary of the translation is often obscure. However, it is a nice melody with a good sense of rhythm and use of alliteration.

Braja has become glorious because of your birth;  
Lakshmi does dwell here because of your love;  
Behold! O Beloved one! All are longing for you ever;  
We are yours, vainly roaming about in dim despair.

Lotuses in autumn bloom all fair and fine  
But your charming eyes outdo their shine  
O God of Love we are but at your sweet service  
Would not our passions be slaked as yet?  
The desire has become poison, cruel like a devil;  
It's like fire and lightning and thunder dreadful;  
It is as panicky as the brat of the monster Maya;  
O Best of All! We are afflicted all the more.

You are not the son of the milk-maid, we perceive;  
You are the Supreme Soul of one and all;  
You have come to this world by Brahma's call;  
And you took this birth in the clan of cowherds.

We got a quarter and got rid of mortality;  
We were from our heart seeking your holy feet.  
Place your lotus hands on our bowing heads,  
The hands that hold the hands of Goddess Lakshmi.

You are the destroyer of the distress of Braja;  
Compose our tattered minds too, we Gopikas pray,  
Our hearts insist on chanting your hymns divine,  
Show us your comely face as sweet as a lotus bud.

Your feet alone absolve the sins of meek mortals;  
The feet that take you to the grazier with the kine;  
And they rest upon the hood of the serpent Kaliya  
Put those feet on our breasts and calm our lust.



Your soft voice and your sweet speeches as well,  
 Your heart-stealing charming glances and all;  
 Have made the minds of ours sensual and impatient;  
 O Krishna! give us the bliss of the nectar of your lips.

From *Gopika-Stuti*, 19th century

Tr. by Gokul Sinha

## Prayers of Draupadi

VIDYARANYAKESARI ARYAL

*Draupadi Stuti* (Draupadī Stuti) by VIDYARANYAKESARI ARYAL (Vidyāranayakesarī Aryāl, 1806-1845) is an original composition, though based on the Sabha Parva of Mahabharata. It is ten stanzas in *Svagata* metre. The poem is highly criticised by some purists for its Hindi elements, despite its relative originality. Of course, its first stanza is totally in Hindi. Aryal's *Yugal-Git* of twenty-eight verses in *Shardulvikridita* is but a metrical translation from the Bhagavat Purana. His third poem *Venu-Git* is also a translation, but has not yet been published.

Dushasana is taking off my cloth;  
 I do come to your refuge, O Lord!  
 Save me from shame amidst the Kurus;  
 I'll be your maid for ever and ever.

For three days I've been in my period;  
 Respectable persons are seated around;  
 What'll be my position in front of them;  
 I'm nearing my death, O Lord of mine!

Properly performing the Rajasuya Yajna,  
 And crushing the pride of all the kings,  
 You exalted the glory of King Dharmaraja,  
 Heed to my supplication too today, I pray,

I'm the queen consort of five Pandavas,  
 And the only sister of king Nrpasena,  
 I've been your votaress since my very birth;  
 Fulfill the prayer of this poor one, O Lord!

No ethics is there in Kuru's assembly,  
 Though Bhishma, Drona, et al are all there,  
 Shame and shyness all gone out of sight;  
 The act is open and known everywhere.

Sitting at the window, Suyodhan's wife  
Is telling the tale of mine to her friends;  
She's looking at me with a leer and jeer;  
O Krishna! my heart is breaking asunder.

Putana, the nurse was redeemed from bondage  
Who had come to you to feed her breast;  
Sudama saw you with a handful of grains;  
His house was filled with wealth and corn.

None is benign in this world, but you;  
None else to think of in such distress;  
Consider your devotee in this hard time;  
And win your spurs in the world again.

Dushasana got tired of stripping the cloth;  
And covered his face with hands ashamed;  
Hearing the call Hari converged upon there  
Where Dushasana was pulling off her cloth.

Seeing the plight of Draupadi there  
He wrapped Himself around her figure;  
All the people highly praised His glory;  
Blessed! Blessed! be the miracle of Hari!

From *Draupadi Stuti*, 19th century

Tr. by M.B.Rai

## Life of Krishna

YADUNATH POKHREL

YADUNATH POKHREL (Yadunāth Pokhrel, 1808-?) is an odd figure, wholly unrepresentative of his time. He is better known as a *virka* poet for his patriotic poems, *Stuti Padya* I, II and III. Yet his *Krishnacharitra* (Kṛṣṇacaritra) is a short composition of twenty-one verses in *Bhujangaprayata* metre. He is reckoned as a devout poet of *Krishnabhakti* school. The first five verses are given below:

Lolling in the lap of mother Yashoda,  
Smiling, sucking and looking about,  
As the Lord enlightens on all around,  
Hari makes my mind full of delight.

Rattling anklets on the lotus-feet,  
And tinkling bracelet around the waist,

Donned in fineries and playing pranks;  
When I muse, my heart fills with mirth.

Golden rings glitters in the ears,  
Curly hairs hang about the rosy cheeks,  
The crown on the head is gracefully bedecked,  
A divine picture the mind does portray.

Olive-wear wraps the body black,  
And the wild-beads reach down the knees  
In silhouette he shines like a lightning,  
The Lord's good looks captivate my mind.

Tender are the lips; milky are the teeth,  
When laughing, they illuminate the atmosphere,  
Still the Lord sports in the mother's lap;  
It makes my mind confused oft and oft.

From *Krishnacharitra*, 19th century

Tr. by Gokul Sinha

## Brahmayajnopanishad

YOGI AMBARGIRA

YOGI AMBARGIRA (-1833) was more a *yogi* than a writer. Still he has written a large number of books. The details of his life are not known. He was primarily a prose writer, yet has composed some couplets in *Sadhukkadi* tongue. Seven books at least have been ascribed to him. *Gita Govinda*, *Vedanta*, *Brahmayajnavedanta*, *Brahmayajnopanisad*, *Yogavasisthasar*, *Vairagyambara* or *Asamanako Bhasha Shrimadbhagavata Gita*. The first and the last are found in fragments. Yogi Ambargira was most probably a priest in the Rama-temple of Janakpur in his later days. From his works he looks a *vedanti* but *Gita-Govinda* shows him an upholder of *bhaktimarga* also. Though his language is languid, the subject matter he took up is quite substantial. His works are very popular amidst the Josmani society, an indigenous religious cult that flourished among the Nepalese.

*Om Namobhagavatey Basudevaya.* Brahma is one pure consciousness. Extraordinary, super-power unique. Maya is unique. What is Brahma? It is like a tree and its shadow. Tree and shadow are not separate objects. Without the tree, where is the shadow? Such is the relation. Brahma is pure and conscious. Maya is transitory and sensitive. Then Brahma is above Maya. No one is above Brahma. Brahma is complete, invisible, supreme. Brahma desired to be many, and so three divine powers were created, i.e. desire, action and knowledge. From Maya these three divine powers were created. Negative suspicion is false. Brahma has got five

names: Brahma, Being, Time, Action, and Nature. The meaning of this is that completeness is Brahma; knowing not of himself is Being; knowing not of himself, but being seen in time, is called Time. Seeing the body is Action, and the creator and the action within action, sweet and bitter, hot and cold, respect and disrespect, misery and luxury, forms Nature. The names of Maya are five: Maya, Sky Ether, Space, Energy and Nature. The meaning of this is Brahma who is complete and able due to Maya to whom the Universe is like a body and there is the sky which being inanimate is called Ether. Conquering the whole world is called Energy; due to revolution it is called Nature. By the conjugation of two such objects creation is started: the five essential elements and the human being formed of these elements. The five elements are thus created separately. . . .

From *Brahmayajnopanishad*, 19th century

Tr. by Haren Allay

## Markandeya Purana

BHAVANIDATTA PANDEY

BHAVANIDATTA PANDEY (Bhavānidatta Pāndey, 1825-?) has translated a number of Puranic works like *Mahabharata Udyoga Parva*, *Markandeya Purana* (Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa), *Atmabodh* besides *Mudraraksasa* and *Hitopadesh*. Pandey has an important place in Nepali prose literature. His language is refined and graceful. Even an arid subject like *Vedanta* is handled in an easy and comprehensible way to make it intelligible to the common people.

The following extract is from the sixteenth chapter:

*Sri Ganeshaya Namah.* A Brahmin once asked his intelligent son: "O son! tell me about those addicted to the system of the world which moves round like a circling wheel and have never been freed from it.

"I also know that all this world is false. But I do not know how to get salvation from this world. Now, what shall I have to do? Tell me about it."

Hearing such words from his father, the son said: "O father! if you respect my words and if you do not suspect them, please go to the forest leaving this domestic life and spend your life there; living with discipline in the forest, even leaving the worshipping of sacred fire, fully concentrating on God, giving up friends and worldly life, living alone, controlling mind and heart, live a hermit's life. But even in a hermit's life, give up all sensual pleasures and concentrate on meditations.

"With such a hermit's life you will be freed from the miseries of worldly life, and achieve salvation; and you will achieve excellent and spontane-

ous meditative contemplation. O father! with such achievement, you do not have to face misery; and then you will achieve salvation with super-human power."

Hearing such words from his son, the father said: "O son! now tell me which way meditation will lead me to salvation. With the control of five essential elements, i.e. earth, water, fire, air and other, tell me the way of meditation, O my son! I may not come again to this world and bear this trouble.

"O' son, with the addiction to supreme knowledge, one does not feel worldly pleasure; due to my innocence I feel for the state of the poor and the rich but I have a soul which may not be tied up. Tell me the path of meditation. My soul and body are with the rays of the sun. Spray upon me cold water which is full of words of the eternal spirit.

"O son, being stung by innocence as if by a black snake and being dead by its poison, may I and my soul be given life again with your words full of nectar.

"He is my son, she is my wife, this is my house, this is my paddyfield: with all these things I have been surrounded and with worldly love. To place myself in a better state, please make me free and save me with the key of supreme knowledge."

Hearing such words from his father, the son said: "O father, once when Alarka asked Dattatraya, the great and intelligent one, he had explained what meditation was in detail; the same way of meditation I will tell you, please listen to me."

From *Markandeya Purana*, 19th century

Tr. by Haren Allay

## Life of Shrikrishna

BASANTA SHARMA

BASANTA SHARMA (Basanta Sarma, 1803-1890) also known as Basanta Kavi or Basanta Jaisi, is a pioneer Krishnamargi poet. His *Shri Krishnacharitra* (Śrīkṛṣṇacaritra) is regarded as the first Nepali epic or *khandakavya* having 169 stanzas in classical metre. It is his independent work based on the *Bhagavat Purana* with some alterations in the story. The translation of Mahabharata is another of his major works. In his *Mahabharata* and *Shri Krishnacharitra* he has omitted the so-called vulgar scenes; this shows him as a less sensuous and more devotional poet. Another famous poem of his is *Samudralahari*, a Vedantic treatise containing 90 stanzas in a local metre. All critics agree that there is a genuine use of the vernacular in his works. Certainly, with him we discern the beginning of a breakthrough in the matter of shedding Hindi influence in favour of a more colloquial Nepali diction.

15 stanzas from the poem are given below:

Shri Krishna, a divine incarnation, was born  
in a certain city called Mathurapuri.  
Wielded in his hands were the conch, the wheel,  
the mace and the lotus;  
His feet were as soft as the lotus itself.  
A bejewelled crown he had on his head,  
the wheel of *sudarshana* in his hand.  
Shri Basudeva saw in him this form  
the complete view of the four-armed one  
which He revealed. (1)

Vigilant were the sentries  
along with the elephants, the lions and the serpents.  
But all swooned away in the night  
under the spell of the illusion created by the Lord.  
The door got unlocked, the enemies duped,  
and so easy was the path  
that he reached Gokul sprinkling the water of Kalindi,  
Offering his prayers, the most devoted one in the night. (2)

Jasudaji, the worthiest one  
whose house Basudeva stepped into  
by opening the door,  
and in a moment he stood before her.  
Sleeplessness, anxiety and exhaustion:  
because of the Jasumati was unconscious then.  
Mayadevi, these new-born baby,  
Basudeva took back to Mathurapuri. (3)

The day dawned, the night was gone,  
it was bright everywhere.  
The sentries came back to their senses;  
they walked towards the gate.  
The moan of the mother lightly heard,  
the demons came flocking by,  
The evil ones all went close to Kamsa  
they reported that a son was born. (4)

Kamsa leaped, dreadful he became  
with cruel eyes.  
He drew close to Basudeva  
and sat there for a while.

Brooding over something unknown;  
     he quickly dragged the baby away  
 from the lap of Devakiji,  
     and on an impulse took it into his arms. (5)

"Please do not kill it", Devakiji entreated thus.  
     His eyes were red, Kamsa was angry;  
 he did not care to reply.  
     Full of guile he caught the baby  
 desirous of killing it by all means.  
     Something miraculous did happen then  
 When the door was opened and  
     he brought the baby out. (6)

Mayadevi, Mother of the Universe, she was there  
     for a fraction of a second  
 The lock of the arms she broke and flew  
     up into the heaven with the speed of lightning.  
 A voice was heard, a revelation —  
     audible to each and every one,  
 that at Gokul his slayer was already born. (7)

On hearing this, King Kamsa returned  
     full of anxiety.  
 The future was fore-told;  
     his mind was in a fix  
 Back at the palace he called his ministers  
     and counselling did he take, to make sure  
 that, at Gokul, all new-born babies  
     were put to the sword, sparing not a single one. (8)

When the orders were passed thus,  
     everybody was alerted,  
 And those at the services of Kamsa  
     proceeded at the very next instance.  
 Hounding out day and night,  
     all became professed hunters.  
 But all the babies, in the kingdom,  
     were facing a great trial. (9)

The rays of the sun were manifest upon the earth  
     and Yashoda was awake;  
 Delighted very much she was  
     when she glanced at the baby's face

With supernatural sight she perceived  
     Bedecked with jewels the crown was there  
 over the forehead,  
     She smiled at once and planted a kiss  
 on the face of the Lord. (10)

A propagation of progeny she felt it was,  
     which amused her exceedingly.  
 To see such a countenance  
 but it was a matter of conjecture.  
 She went to Brahma, the sage, for an enquiry;  
 with folded hands she narrated all;  
 With devotion and concentration full  
 she told him all that had happened. (11)

Brahmaji reached Gokul, where he was received  
 with full paraphernalia  
 Going through the Shastras, the pros and cons,  
 He proclaimed the incarnation of Lord Krishna.  
 Saying this Brahmaji went out of sight;  
 which was followed by Krishna's naming  
     that took place in a gay ceremony. (12)

The *mrdanga*, the conch, the drum and the flute  
 the trumpet, the *damaru*, the cymbals, the *majira*  
 the *sitar*, the *veena* and the *khajadi*  
 the *ektara* and other instruments emitting strains,  
 of various kinds including the *dholak* too:  
 They were all played in tune with the set of nine  
 Exhilarating on the occasion of the naming day. (13)  
 Extremely fickle was Kamsa's mind

at this hour of the day;  
 worried he was, he spent in gloom the whole day;  
 scheming something once again, he called Putana  
 and told her all about his device.  
 Pleased he was for having heard  
 what Putana promised that day. (14)

Full of guile in her mind,  
 Putana thought for the second time.  
 She smeared poison on the nipple of her breast



and proceeded towards Gokul.  
 Finding Krishna alone she started  
 feeding Him at her breast.  
 But Krishna sucked her to death. (15)

From *Shri Krishnacharitra*, 19th century

Tr. by M.B.Rai

## The Book of Beauty

RAGHUNATH BHATTA

RAGHUNATH BHATTIA (Raghunāth Bhatta, 1811-1851) preceded Bhanubhakta in writing *Ramayana*, yet he lags behind in popularity when compared with him in language and style. But as an independent poet, we can ascribe to him a strong sensibility. His poems prove him an extempore poet, who could wield his pen with ease under every circumstance. He possessed a good knowledge of Sanskrit prosody and profusely used it in his writings. His *Sundarakanda* (Sundarakānda) is a treasure house of classical metres.

Exerting utmost strength,  
 And making the ocean a cow-hoof pond,  
 Setting ablaze the demons  
 Making his body as big as Mount Sumeru  
 He earned the name of a learned one  
 How fortunate! Hanuman came back again,  
 Kapipati, an appellation he got,  
 And gained the love of Shri Rama.

Doffing doubts with elation.  
 Hanuman leaped to cross the ocean  
 Which measured a hundred *yojanas* in length,  
 Abounding with sea-animals.

Adoring in mind the feet of Rama, he spoke:  
 "O monkeys! look at me now, in the sky do I go.  
 I'll have the sight of Sita; blessed am I,  
 And coming back I apprise Rama sure, I will.

"One who remembers the name of Rama  
 At the time of his death  
 Shall cross this endless earthly ocean,  
 And salvation he gets.  
 I am His messenger, whose gold ring

Is with me as a token.  
It's nothing to cross this limited ocean,  
Just keeping Him in mind".

Patiently this much Hanuman spoke  
And with stretched hands and a straight neck  
With lowered eyes and feet drawn up  
Facing south he flew fast in the air.

Seeing his flight, gods in heaven  
Talked to each other  
Whether Hanuman could enter Lanka.  
Eager to know, they were.  
Turning to Mother-Serpent, they asked  
Her to hasten to test  
The intellect and strength of Hanuman  
With some tricks.

Surasa went to hinder Hanuman;  
She sat blocking his way and said:  
"Knowing my hunger, gods gave me food,  
Now enter my belly, come, if you could."

"I'm on Shri Rama's duty," said Hanuman,  
Having heard her words.  
"I am going to search for Sita,  
It takes me no time.  
After apprising Rama the news of Sita  
I shall come back and enter  
Your mouth; please be content at present  
with just my salutations."

Even then Surasa said: "Get into my mouth;  
Right now;  
If you don't, I'll devour you up,  
Since I am very hungry."

"Open your mouth, I get in and go;  
I'm in a great hurry,"  
Said Hanuman and made his body  
A *yojana* big, dauntlessly.

At this Surasa opened her mouth  
As wide as five *yojanas*;

Grew Hanuman upto ten *yojanas*.  
 She further widened it to twenty.  
 As Hanuman became thirty *yojanas*,  
 She widened her mouth to fifty.  
 Nimble Hanuman, like a ring, got in  
 And out of her mouth, and said:

"I entered your mouth and came back too  
 Now let me proceed, my salutations to you."  
 As she heard this, she wondered at it.  
 Blessing the monkey, she admitted defeat.

"I had been sent by the gods to gauge  
 Your strength, so I hindered you.  
 Easily you can have the sight of Sita  
 And reach the refuge of Rama as well."

Saying this Surasa to heaven withdrew,  
 And flew in the sky Hanuman too,  
 With the agility of Garuda,  
 Keeping the work of Shri Rama in mind.

The Ocean in the meantime whispered to Mainaka:  
 "As Sagara nurtured me, the name *Sagara* I got;  
 Rama will be born in his lineage, and in his job  
 A monkey comes, for his repose you go as a hill-tip."

The golden peak of Mainaka took a human form  
 Coming close to Hanuman made a request to him:  
 "Have some fruits, O monkey! and for a while rest;  
 I've come up to host you at the ocean's behest."

"Since I'm on Rama's duty, improper it is to eat;  
 So the recess matters not; quickly I've to go  
 In search of Sita anon," said Hanuman and  
 Touching him with his hands, he soared like a bird.

As he went a little way  
 He met a dreadful Simhika;  
 When she slackened his speed  
 He eyed down and behold her.

She could grab the reflection  
 And eat the creature

He killed her with a kick.  
And darted, facing Lanka.

Going south he saw on the land  
A lot of fruits, birds and deer.  
Then he saw on the top of Trikuta  
Lanka, covered under sea-walls.

"By night I shall enter the city of Ravana,"  
Thought Hanuman and bided all day long.  
Assuming a small form as night fell  
He entered the door of Lanka and was gay.

From *Ramayana*, 19th century

Tr. by Gokul Sinha

## Poems

### BHANUBHAKTA ACHARYA

The role of BHANUBHAKTA ACHARYA (Bhānubhakta Ācārya, 1814-1868) in the literary scene of Nepali is of great importance and his short and long poems, primarily *Ramayana*, are fundamental to the evolution of modern Nepali literature. He is an apex of the medieval period and an initiator of modern literature. He is a watershed between the old and new sensibilities and strides both the ages. Highly honoured by the Nepali speaking world, he is reverently regarded as the *Adi Kavi*, the Poet Premier. He wrote not only a complete epic but a number of other works as well. But to establish a chronology of his compositions is somewhat complicated. He wrote *Ramayana* piecemeal and his short poems are occasional pieces. However, it is known that his first two works of translations were *Prashnottari* and *Balakanda*.

## 1

### The Book of Boyhood

The first canto of *Balakanda* was completed in 1841. Only in 1852-53 he completed the rest of the cantos. the *Bhanubhaktiya Ramayana* fully rest on *Adhyatma Ramayana*. But Nepali *Ramayana* has no *sargas*. The seven *sargas* and three hundred ninety-one *shlokas* of *Adhyatma Ramayana* have been condensed into one hundred and thirty-nine stanzas by Bhanubhakta.

Here the first six stanzas are taken from the renderings of K.M. Munshi.

One day Narada went to *satyaloka* with a view to do good to the world. Brahma was there and he fell at his feet; so he was pleased. As

soon as Brahma permitted him to ask what he desired to ask, he said to him, knowing that Brahma was pleased:

"O Brahma, I have heard everything, auspicious and inauspicious. There is nothing left for me to hear, yet I have a desire. When the *kaliyuga* will come, human beings will be loose in morals and will commit sins of many kinds being impelled to do so by low desires.

"Some will not speak the truth, some will speak ill of others. Some will desire to possess the wealth of others thinking that is good. Some will be infatuated towards the wives of others and some will have a liking for violence. They will consider the body to be the soul like beastly atheists.

"Slaves of passion, they will treat the wife as a god. Fathers and mothers will be like enemies in their eyes. Being Brahmins, they will sell the Vedas. Even if some study them, they will do so for earning wealth, thinking wealth to be a great object.

"Kshatriyas will not observe the rules of the caste and those that are low-born such as Shudras will perform austerities like the Brahmins. Many women will be ruined by showing hostility to their husbands and fathers-in-law. How will such fallen people be able to attain salvation having crossed the ocean of the world?

"This is the anxiety in my mind and I have come to ask for a way out. O Ocean of Kindness! how will these cross the ocean of the world easily? By telling me the way by which they can cross the ocean of the world easily, please satisfy me."

Out of compassion for the world, when Narada asked this, Brahma was very happy to tell him about it. "O Narada! there is no other major means than Ramayana to dissolve all sins. It is like nectar, favourable to all."

"Hearing all elements from Shambhu, Parvati sings it. She feels very happy knowing that the name of Rama is endless. Those who sing it will easily cross this world. Even death shall have no effect. Their every fear will easily pass over.

"Among all the scriptures, this book that tells the tale of Rama is the greatest. Know it to be the major one among all the Puranas as well. Those who recite or even hear it shall get the fruit, the merit of which I cannot describe myself.

"I had heard its glory from Shiva that if one reads even a single stanza with devotion, all the sins will be absolved. One who recites it everyday delightedly and attentively, is freed from the bondage of worldly life. He is like a god, though a human being.

"If one just worships the book, he gets the fruits of an *ashvamedha* or horse sacrifice, his sins will be gone instantly. One who simply greets and salutes the book, he will enjoy the fruits that are earned by worshipping all the gods.

"The fruits which are not attainable by reading all the four Vedas and expounding the scriptures, that are easily obtained by donating the book. If on the day of *ekadashi*<sup>1</sup>, going to some devotees' house, one reads it with devoutness, one shall get the fruits of twenty-four times *gayatri*<sup>2</sup> recitals.

"One who takes fasting on *Ramanavami* and wakefully spends the night either reciting or hearing this Ramayana with rapt attention, know all that he has made a *tulapurushadana* after a pilgrimage on the occasion of solar eclipse. He will be blissful, no doubt.

"Even Indra will obey the person who recites Ramayana, admitting him as dear to, and a devotee of Rama. Reading it daily, one who performs good deeds, gains fruits a crore times more; decreases not a jiffy.

"To absolve sin, Rama will reside in the heart of a Brahmin-killer even, if he reads for three days his soul will be pure. Rama bestows mercy on him. One who reads daily thrice, keeping Hanuman in front, shall enjoy all sorts of pleasures as he desires.

"One who reads it going round a *tulsi* or a *pipal* tree, his sins of all births, whatsoever, shall be gone then and there. *Rama Gita* is greater still therein, the glory of which is known only to Shiva; none other knows about it.

"Parvati knows half of it, I know only one-fourth. I deem to say there is no sin that cannot be destroyed by reading the Gita. Churning the Vedas Rama took out Gita as sweet as nectar. He gave it to Lakshmana, reading which one can cross this world.

"Parashurama with the keen intention of positively killing Kartavirya used to read it daily with Shiva, bowing at His feet. Hearing the recitation of Rama Gita by Parvati, he began to read it. This made him Narayana.

"If one reads the Rama Gita for a whole month, all his *brahmahatyas*<sup>3</sup> and other sins will be absolved, what more should I say. If one reads Rama Gita by the side of a *saligrama*, a *tulsi*, a *pipal* or a *sanyasi*, he is a great *mahatma*.

The fruits that cannot be expressed in words, they shall enjoy. If one reads in *Sraddha*<sup>4</sup>, their ancestors will cross over the bonds. Following the

1. The eleventh day of lunar month.

2. One of the most important *mantras* chanted by devotees.

3. The sin of killing a Brahmin.

4. Funeral ceremonies.

austerities, on the days of *dashami* and *ekadashi* as well sitting under the *agasti* tree, one who solemnly decides to read Gita, and reverently reads Rama Gita, taking a fasting, he is not a man but as much as Rama. Those who perform no alms, no meditation and no pilgrimage but read this Rama Gita only, they will attain an everlasting refuge crossing over this world easily.

From *Ramayana: Balakanda*, 19th century

Tr. by K.M. Munshi & Gokul  
Sinha

### Catechism

Bhanubhakta went to Varanasi with his grandfather Shri Krishna Acharya in connection with the latter's Kashivasa. There he used to listen to Shankaracharya's *Maniratnamala* recited by Shri Krishna every morning. Bhanubhakta also could recite the hymn and understand it, and hence he translated it. The original text in Sanskrit consists of 32 stanzas, whereas the translation has 50 stanzas in the *upendravajra* metre

Fifteen stanzas are given here:

Like one sunk into the deep sea  
I am put onto this wide world.  
Tell me soon where I can take shelter:  
Shri Krishna's feet are the main boat to cross (1)

Who is the person who is always in bondage?  
The one who is always after worldly pleasures.  
What is meant by the term salvation?  
Apathy towards worldly interests is salvation. (2)

What is regarded as the worst hell?  
This very human body is the worst hell.  
What kind of nature is regarded as heavenliness?  
When all kinds of nature are completely given up. (3)

What is the highest knowledge for which one should strive?  
The knowledge of Vedanta will liberate all from misery.  
How can a person gain salvation of the soul easily?  
The realisation of the self or knowledge and no more. (4)

Which is the main entrance to hell?  
The passion in a man drags him to hell.

And which act leads him to heaven?  
The act of non-violence leads him to heaven. (5)

What kind of a man goes to sleep happily?  
The one who becomes one with the Supreme Being.  
Who is the one to know how to be awake?  
The one who distinguishes right from wrong. (6)

Whom should regard as an enemy?  
Our ten senses are our worst enemies.  
And whom would we know as our friend?  
Those who could control ten senses, they are the friends (7)

Who is the person to be known as poor?  
The one who is after hankering is poor.  
Then who is really a rich person?  
The one who remains contented is rich. (8)

Who is to be known as a living corpse?  
The one who remains inactive is a living corpse.  
What is as joyful as nectar? Desirelessness.  
What is meant by bondage? Undue attachment. (9)

Who plays the part of alcohol?  
A woman who captivates the mind.  
Whom do the learned treat as trifling?  
One who is a slave of passions. (10)

What is meant by death, tell me today?  
It is slander which is as good as death.  
Whom do you call the *guru* of all?  
One who gives good advice is a *guru*. (11)

Who is a disciple, a true disciple?  
One who offers services to his *guru*.  
What is meant by a chronic disease?  
The world's cycle of birth and death. (12)

What is the cure of one's chronic disease?  
To treat the world as transient is the cure.  
What is regarded by noble persons as ornament?  
One's modesty is regarded as the best ornament. (13)

Which is the best holy place for pilgrimage?  
One's pure mind is the best holy place.



What is regarded as trifle by wise men?  
 Women and wealth are regarded as trifles. (14)

Which is the best teaching that one should listen to?  
 The teaching of Vedanta is to be heard from a guru.  
 What are the ways of realizing the Absolute One?  
 A good company, study of Vedanta, and contemplation. (15)

From *Prashnottara*, 19th century

Tr. by Gokul Sinha

### 3

#### Song of Rama

The *Rama Gita* is a philosophical treatise of Bhanubhakta Acharya, based on the *Adhyatma Ramayana*. It is an independent work of the poet later included in his magnum opus, the *Ramayana*.

#### i

The Lord took a human form for the welfare of the common people and acted as the wise oldsters. He performed phenomenal feats so that mankind may hear or tell His divine sports and crush the worldly bonds.'

#### ii

Once Lakshmana sitting by the Lord's side asked him what was the deadly poison. Rama told him that it was the property of a Brahmin and he narrated the story of King Nriga in detail. Lakshmana was convinced; still he went on asking questions.

#### iii

"O Lord! You are the personified knowledge, soul of all corporeals, still you took this form and redeemed earthly burdens by every means. Only the devotees know that it is a divine drama of the Lord in soul-personation. They further say this divine sport is on account of your compassion.

#### iv

"O Lord! Considering you the Supreme, I seek refuge at your feet. Teach me the way how I may cross over the abysmal ocean of *samsara* or the birth-cycle and enjoying bliss I may reach heaven with ease."

v

Having heard these words of Lakshmana, Rama with a smiling face, removing all sorts of anguish of His devout brother, imparted the knowledge of reality which is enjoined even by the Vedas, as a secure bridge for mankind to cross over.

vi

"First of all discharging all the duties of *varna* or caste and *ashrama* or stage of life and thereby having subdued ten senses and the mind, one should approach the *guru* and with incessant service of the *guru* should ask for divine knowledge. Attaining this knowledge many have crossed the *samsara*.

vii

"If one performs his actions with a craving, he shall be born accordingly. He enjoys the fruits concerned and again performs many other actions with his mind attached. Consequently being led by the force of his actions he is born again in this very world. Thus he revolves in this world like a wheel.

viii

"It is ignorance that like a foe causes all to revolve. Know that it is the knowledge of Self that puts an end to ignorance. There is no difference between ignorance and actions. Therefore actions cannot destroy ignorance. Nothing but wisdom destroys it.

ix

"Neither ignorance nor attachment is destroyed by the nescient actions. Such actions make one cycling in this world. So one has to realize the wisdom that has helped many to cross through. Forsaking wisdom who has reached the end by actions only?

x

" Some say that the Vedas also enjoin action as a firm supporter to knowledge; so performance of action is ordained for support. Let them say so. But not a bit support does knowledge need. Know it. How far should I tell?

*xi*

"Actions reside in body as an integral ego. If there is knowledge, bodied ego will vanish. Knowledge and actions are inconsistent; how can they become affable? It is only knowledge that is able to afford salvation. Know it everywhere.

*xii*

"The *shrutis*, like Vajasaneyi, Taittiriya, also maintain that knowledge needs not the help of any other. As such, realizing action as repugnant, one should renounce it altogether, and should aspire after knowledge wholeheartedly.

*xiii*

"The meaning of this profound saying, *tattvamasī* or that thou art, should be properly understood. It consists of three words. Construe the import of these three words. *Tat* stands for Supreme Spirit, the word *twam* for individual self, and both are united by one word *asī*. One should contemplate on it day and night.

*xiv*

"The body is composed of *mayā* or illusion; eventually it passes away. It consists of five gross elements. The body which experiences the weal and woe of this world is called *sthulopadhi* or the larger basis of the principles of one's soul.

*xv*

"Made up of ten senses, one mind and nondivisible five elements, sixteen in all, this astral body is known as *sukshmopadhi* or the subtle basis. It is the main organ that experiences. This subtle one is always within the gross disguise. When it is removed, the gross one shall dissolve. It does not stop a while.

*xvi*

"The sentient soul is free to disguise like a pure and clear crystal. When it comes in contact with a coloured object, the clear crystal also looks coloured. Out of these two delusions when the soul is singled out, it is liberated then and there. Otherwise there is no other way to attain the knowledge of Self.

*xvii*

"Crystal appears reddish in touch with red. Similarly the soul in touch with false representation seems false. But neither the crystal nor the soul has any red hue. This reflection is just a hallucination. This should be kept in mind.

*xviii*

"Wakefulness, dream and sound sleep are the threefold states of this intellect. But they too are false. Knowing that an eternal bliss is derived only from the Supreme soul, one should control these three qualities and realize the Self. The attributes within the Self are false; so renounce them.

*xix*

"The woeful world is not contained in the blissful Self. It is only due to ignorance that it reflects itself in the Self as true. Even a wise one mistakes a rope for a snake. In the same way the world of various attributes is seen in the Supreme Self.

*xx*

"Thus the wrong supposition is in the Supreme Self. Ego, desires, all the qualities of intellect; they have no essence. The Self is an onlooker. These attributes are extraneous, intruded for nothing, as heat enters iron.

*xxi*

"The Self should be recognized with the help of Vedas and from one's *guru*. By recognizing the Self one is released then and there. Therefore one should contemplate on the Self: What I am. No other way is there to destroy nescience.

*xxii*

"The Self can be realized thus: retiring to seclusion, restraining the ten senses and mind and meditation ever on Self-knowledge. Think that the manifested world is not other than the Self itself. By knowing this very essence, one becomes one with the Universal Self.

*xxiii*

"In the state of nescience *Omkara* is the verbal expression of the whole universe. When this expression is united with the Self, knowledge may go waxing. When *a*, *u*, *ma*, these three get merged in the Self in the presence of the Universe, then there remains nothing but the Self, devoid of all attributes.

*xxiv*

"When through knowledge one resolves that he is the very Self, he is said to be liberated, he falls not in misery. Controlling the ten senses and crushing the mighty passion when one practises *samadhi* or deep contemplation, Hari, the Supreme Lord, will appear before him.

*xxv*

"Ever meditate on the endless Supreme Being, endure pain or pleasure deeming it mere fate. Whiling away the days in this way, when one dies, he shall be merged with Me leaving the suffering of the world behind.

*xxvi*

"Being corporeal, one neither in the beginning nor in the middle, nor in the end, finds perfect happiness. It is a fact. Therefore leaving all other ways aside and meditating on the Self only, one shall be identical with me just as water reaching the ocean merges itself.

*xxvii*

"The Self, and only the Self is true; the rest is false. It seems true as in the case of rope and snake. Understand it; if not understood, serve Me and you shall understand. Otherwise it cannot be repelled.

*xxviii*

"I told you all the essence and the secrets of the Vedas. Those who ever muse on it; their sins of innumerable previous lives shall be expunged. Therefore, brother mine! the world you see is nothing but a false magic. By means of worshipping Me you live in the beatitude.

xxix

"Either blithely worship this manifested form of Mine or meditate on the unmanifested Supreme Self, it is all the same. Both are like Me, I am akin to both; analogously with Me they sanctify all the worlds touching with mere feet.

xxx

"Whoever, with faith and devotion in Me and in his preceptor, studies attentively this essence of *Srutis* as the fundamental principle, his ignorance will be annihilated, and becoming one with Me he shall easily cross the worldly ocean."

From *Rama Gita*, 19th century

Tr. by Gokul Sinha

4

Assorted Poems

Elements of medieval and modern are perceptible in Bhanubhakta's short poems. They are purely mundane, written on various subjects ranging from rites and rituals, astrology and liturgy, health and hygiene to games and even gambling .

15 popular pieces are given below :

i

Egrossed in grass his entire life  
The money that he made  
To keep the name hereafter also,  
A well he caused to spade.

A grass-cutter, of a poor house:  
But what a sense he has!  
I, Bhanubhakta, being wealthy,  
Am such today, alas!

To my credit neither have I wells  
Nor have I any hospices  
All are in my house shut up,  
Whatever wealth and riches.

What a lesson the grass-cutter has  
 Taught me today in fact!  
 Fie upon me who am living,  
 Without a meritorious act!

*ii*

There in Tanahu, the best of hills,  
 Shrikrishna Brahmin lived;  
 Owing to lofty Aryan strain,  
 To virtues he paid heed.

Being a savant, in sacred lores  
 He imparted me too well,  
 I am his grandson Bhanubhakta;  
 Know me that I tell.

*iii*

Gajadhar's wife proved to be a bale;  
 She's taken adieu from all for hell,  
 Reaching their house, in porch I sat,  
 Drove she away an open night I had.

*iv*

After long I behold Balaju today;  
 The heaven on earth, I deem to say.  
 Birds are roosting on creepers' arm;  
 Voice is vinous as soft notes charm.

Had I been blessed to poetize here,  
 What other delight would I look for  
 To make a damsel dance withal!  
 Along with Indra heaven would fall.

Brisk belles in graceful gait  
 Tucking *gunakesari*<sup>1</sup> on their heads,

Wander about in cheery company  
Kantipur city is Indra's heaven.

Millionaires myriad one can find;  
Men are so happy in their mind;  
It's thus a people's pleasure-ocean;  
Kantipur city is the Kubera's heaven.

Like Bhot or London or a China city  
Like those of Delhi the lanes are busy.  
Like Lucknow, Patna, Madras somewhere  
Kantipur city is the abode of Kubera.

Swords and sabres, *khukris*, rapiers,  
Armed with pistols, guns and revolvers,  
Bold and brave all swarm the city  
Which is like this Kantipur city !

Where no malice and frauds are found,  
Only there do the virtues abound;  
The Lord of Beasts is seated for safety;  
The abode of Shiva this Kantipur city.

VI

None can count the gods who here dwell;  
Shrines are here to consecrate all.  
As holy as this there is no other land  
*Ghat* is to redeem as Shiva doth stand  
Maya of God, *Guhyakali*, the mother  
Of cosmos, is seated, blessings to shower.

vii

This Girdhari has beset me, lord!  
Much ado about nothing  
But to entangle this intrigue  
It is feasible that I think.

To humbly lay down before my lord  
A few rhymes I make here;



Please peruse the poem I pray  
The dispute will be soon over. . . . .

[The poem is fragmented. A good number of verses seem lost.]

There are other materials too;  
Paper, deeds and tokens;  
Audience and evidence, all are there;  
And converse that concerns.

I won't persuade further, Sire!  
Please, if done, avert;  
Gladly do I adduce these all,  
Just to undo the knot.

True indeed the statements are,  
That I mentioned above.  
Records and proofs have been here  
Produced for the probe.

If law-courts find not the facts,  
This is for your decree:  
I vouch to pay to the pie, my lord,  
As law demands, from me.

#### *VIII*

Neither to ward off the death, Sire  
Thus picking up a brawl;  
Nor to become a millionaire,  
Abounding with wherewithal.  
The days but while away in vain  
How to console the heart  
Rule over it by any means.  
Have mercy upon me, lord!

#### *ix*

Just a few words of my mind  
To vent I had been to you  
Reporting my presence I go back,  
As I could not see you.

Mute and dumb I proceed now  
To my home today.  
I shall come to your honour again,  
My humble words to lay.

*x*

How long should I supplicate  
To judges and the jury;  
They keep mum, and if they utter,  
Just say morrow in perjury.

Why dilly-dally the more;  
Just decide or dismiss avow  
Know the morrow never comes.  
I have become a pauper enow.

*xi*

Ever I chance to see your honour  
My heart is not in plight  
The whole night free I enjoy the dance  
I am in a great delight.

Mosquitoes, fleas, bedbugs are mates,  
Sitting in their concert;  
Mosquitoes sing and fleas do dance  
I witness them in comfort.

*xii*

Neither a service have I got  
Nor a rich man am I;  
By tillage I lived hard, did serve  
To earn an honour high.

With a single mind I served;  
So pleased was the lord  
That over the honour an everlasting  
Dishonour He conferred.

I aged, as old as forty years  
And have a son of eight,

Time has neared for *bratabandha*<sup>1</sup>,  
A moment that is great.

Helpless I am lonesome here  
In this tight corner;  
How to perform this *bratabandha*  
The world seems but sombre.

To teach *Gayatri* a father's right;  
And mother's to give alms,  
To read the Veda in early age,  
To serve *gurus* and cows.

Time is such a momentous one.  
A redeeming act it is;  
How far should I implore the more;  
Let me brief my pleas.

You are the masters of this earth  
Even when, today  
A Brahmin's rite is at stake.  
I, therefore, beg to pray.

With humble request to your honour  
Make this appeal here;  
"To hell with your appeal": if so ruled  
I have but to bear.

### XIII

The body is but a fleeting matter  
Living by mere food and grains  
Much to account for, that this life,  
Met with, in the long durance.

Suffered a lot falling to ailment,  
The complaint was bout again,  
Vainly was I caged at Kumaricok;  
Wrecked, I came home from the den.

1. The investiture of sacred thread.

The ailment increased, troubled a lot,  
 But now feeling a bit fine,  
 Shall have the same fate if fettered again;  
 You are the only lord of mine.

## xiv

Let my love be undying, dear,  
 That I do conjure  
 Your heart a cage, a bird am I;  
 Let this act endure.

## xv

[In the anthology of short poems, the poet's Prologue to his *Badhushiksha* has also been assorted by the critics.]

Mind not, O my dear Tarapati!  
 One thing I should tell you;  
 The members of your family here  
 Are much brawler, I knew.

The wranglings of the house I heard  
 The brabble and the fight  
 I could not catch forty winks  
 Wakeful passed the night.  
 Nothing is wanting as I see  
 Riches, repute and fortune;  
 If the daughter-in-law is such a shrew  
 The house is how you run,

I composed here this *Bandhushiksha*  
 As I lost my temper,  
 May it help you to discipline  
 Your wife, daughter and other!

Albeit a guest am I Here,  
 It least concerns me,  
 I should say this, even though  
 You are a friend to me

## Medieval Oriya Literature

### Shri Shishu Veda

ANONYMOUS

Very little is known about the author of *Shri Shishu Veda* (Shrī Śīsu Veda, c. 14th century). Since before the spread of Vaishnavism, literature influenced by the Natha cult was popular in Orissa, the writer of *Shishu Veda* was probably a disciple of Gorakhanatha.

Not one but two  
 Different and separate  
 With constant flow but distinct from water.  
 Between the two, the *Sushumna*  
 And there shines the Light,  
 Says Natha.  
 This is the faith of the realised ones—the *Siddhas*.  
*Kala, Kamala* and *Niranjana*,  
 Time, Manifestation and the One without Stain,  
 These three live together at the same place.  
 The teacher who teaches this to all seekers  
 Is the Teacher and, I, the slave of this slave.  
 He lived in the midst of the seven seas,  
 But did not drink a drop  
 He was in the mother's womb,  
 But did not feed at her breast.  
 He continues to be what he was when he came.  
 Please get acquainted with him  
 After ascertaining from the Guru.  
 The eyes and the mind have the same perception:  
 The essence is in between.  
 The mind determines what the eyes see;  
 Thus, the mind only sits over the eyes.  
 The essence, the Light of the Brahma,  
 Is self-manifest.  
 When breath reverses itself

Piercing through the six vital centres,  
 The waters dry up, but the essence remains.  
 The Yogi who unties the knot of the vital centres  
 By making use of the sun and the moon,  
 The breaths of the right and left nostrils,  
 Is the most perfect architect.  
 There the three mountains,  
 The mountain of the rising sun,  
 The mountain of the setting sun,  
 And the Mountain of the void  
 Come together.  
 And the elephants feed on them.  
 When the elephant feeds on *maharasa*, the supreme nectar,  
 And controls the two wings,  
 The two mountains of the rising and setting suns,  
 He is one with the sky, the mountain of the void.  
 Realising this the mind becomes still;  
 Knowing oneself one attains perfection,  
 Which brought bliss to the great God Mahadeva,  
 When the mind is stilled  
 And the breath does not flow  
 Things come to an end but end not,  
 Life ceases yet ceases not,  
 This is the Truth:  
 Says Gorakha the king,  
 Life never leaves the body then.  
 The mind is like a fickle maiden,  
 The breath is ever forgetful  
 How can one have any attachment to them ?  
 If by straightening the coiled energy  
 One can pierce the lotus at the *muladhara*  
 —The vital centre at the base of the spine—  
 He is deemed to have fathomed only a half.  
 One should keep this half a victory to oneself,  
 Never speaking about it to another,  
 And continue drinking the cool water  
 Oozing from the lotus.  
 By the grace of the Guru  
 He is sure to move up  
 And first taste  
 And then continue drinking

The sweet nectar at the Sahasrara.  
 When mind dies, life lives.  
 When mind dies, wisdom is gained.  
 When the mind and the organs of the body  
 Cease going outward and turn inward  
 Brahma becomes interested in such a man  
 And brings him happiness.  
 When breath is stilled,  
 Cravings end.  
 When mind is stilled,  
 Lust dies,  
 When the sex fluids are held immobile  
 Only then does the vital *prana* energy  
 Takes cognizance of the body  
 Follow that sound  
 And find what you seek  
 Once awakened to life  
 You can bring life back to the dead.  
 Transcending both time and time-lessness,  
 Commanding the God of Death to return the waters of life.  
 Life cannot be had  
 By groping with hands inside the body.  
 You may shout, "Where are you, life?"  
 But would never get the response, "Here I am."  
 The essence of life is not revealed by any chant.  
 Where goes life at death ?  
 One who moves not when everything moves  
 One who does not get drenched when it rains night and day  
 One who gets not a single scratch  
 When repeatedly struck by swords.  
 You can know  
 This is that  
 Only by following the words of the Guru,  
 Sound produces noise,  
 There is no noise without sound,  
 The sound that is produced by itself:  
 That sound is soundless.  
 Sound and soundless dwell together.  
 Die, die, O wise, since death is sweet,  
 The death for which Gorakha is eager.  
 Where do beings go at death ?

Surrender yourselves while still alive  
 Raising the vital juices in clockwise movement  
 Makes the body stronger by day,  
 Suck in the vital fluids,  
 Make the seed immobile;  
 "This", says Natha, "is the way to life eternal."  
 When breathing is quickened  
 And the breath moves upward beyond the navel  
 The path is easy for the Yogi,  
 For uniting mind and breath at the same place.  
 The centre of the sky melts.  
 Mind and breath stilled  
 Awareness evaporates.  
 And the state of mindlessness is reached,  
 This is the essence  
 Of the Guru's teaching.  
 Like a heron standing in water without causing ripples,  
 Still your mind and breath,  
 Know that the heron, the fish and the water  
 Are one and the same.  
 Only then shall life know the body.  
 In which vital centre resides the wind ?  
 In which vital centre is the mind stilled ?  
 In which vital centre things taste sweet ?  
 In which vital centre is *Samadhi* attained ?  
 Wind resides at the vital centre of the navel.  
 Mind is stilled at the vital centre of the heart.  
 Sweet taste comes at the vital centre of the throat.  
*Samadhi* is attained in the vital centre of the Void beyond the skull.  
 Below that the *Pianla* waters dance.  
 Not being united with it, the *Pianla* only suffers.  
 It has neither shape nor form,  
 Nor is there any bond or any shadow  
 That one pervades the Universe,  
 Lighter than cotton wool and heavier than the three worlds,  
 Thin like a strand of hair,  
 Softer than butter yet totally unyielding.  
 No needle can penetrate  
 When heavy gales lash the world day and night.  
 He protects *Mina*, *Chaurangi* and *Gorakha* Abadhuta.  
 Matsyendranatha is the mind,



Chauranginatha is divine consciousness embodied,  
 And Gorakhanatha is wisdom incarnate.  
 This teaching revealed here  
 Can bring the cycle of births and deaths to an end.  
 One holding this simple doctrine to heart  
 Never dies, says Shiva, the Great God Ishwara.

*Shri Shishu Veda*, c. 14th century

Tr. by Rajendra Prasad Das

## The Treasure House of Immortality

ANONYMOUS

*Amara Kosha* (Amara Kōśa c.14th century), written in the form of a dialogue between the teacher Adinatha and his disciple Loi, might have been composed by Loi or someone belonging to his school. The language, the organisation and the theme of the work are indicative of the prevalent mode in literature prior to the age of Sarala Das.

Hail Shabarinatha!  
 The embodiment of archetypal form,  
 Hail Kanthadinatha!  
 The embodiment of the secret fundamental doctrine,  
 Hail Jalandhara!  
 The teacher of the doctrine of wisdom,  
 Hail Gobindachandra!  
 The jewel among nine lac kings,  
 Hail Tushtikapaya!  
 The architect of the doctrine of the body,  
 Hail the king of men, King Harishchandra  
 Hail Jujeshti (Yudhisthira), the king of men,  
 The embodiment of Dharma and Truth,  
 Hail Chandesvara of the earth,  
 Who incarnated himself nine lac times,  
 Who appearing even in a dream  
 Showers grace on all the three worlds.

A person thinking of Ishwara  
 On setting out on a journey,  
 Has no fear of meeting a robber or a killer,  
 Even a female serpent seeing him from a distance  
 Slithers off his path.

Try and follow, my son,  
This discourse on wisdom.  
Above that is the God of the lotus—the Moon,  
The fire grows with air,

Listen, my dear Loi,  
 The fire comes to life  
 Only in the waters of the confluence of the three streams  
 And only by penetrating those waters  
 May you reach the portals of the Brahma.  
 There, the only worship is to suck in the waters  
 Which make the body dry.  
 Hide the fire in the mouth  
 Feeding it with the fuel of breath  
 And in no time the fire burns, grows  
 And spreads in the seven nether worlds.  
 My dear son, please try and understand  
 The secret of this treasurehouse of immortality—  
 The *Amarakosha*.  
 Above the vital centre of the heart  
 Shines the Supreme Soul together with the embodied life.

Now listen Loi  
 The way of the nine dancers  
     —the nine vital nerve centres:  
 The heart is the Golaghata, the shining focus of the Universe;  
 Above that is the indescribable incomprehensible soul;  
 Above that reside the eightyfour crores of emanations.

And son,  
 The passage through which the eighty four crores of emanations come  
 Is barred by the unyielding gates of the Niranjana, the stainless.

Listen, Loi,  
 In the region of the tonsils, the constricted passage of the throat  
 Is the spot which never goes dry.  
 And there at the place of Brahma  
 The three streams meet.

Listen son, Loi,  
 That is the region of the cool threshold of knowledge,  
 Above that the snares are set by the agents of Kali and Kala,  
 The God and Goddess of annihilation.  
 And beyond lies the place of the moon of wisdom,  
 Which the sages and the realised ones seek.  
 Beyond are the mountain ranges of the Void,  
 The city of no-sound,

No-sound, the voice of the immortals.  
 The embodied Void is at the root of the nasal entrance;  
 Lord Bishnu acquired his greatness  
 Only through meditating upon that embodiment of Void,  
 Beyond are the Kanaya mountains,  
 Where nestle the caves of the bumble-bee,  
 But he forgets his buzzing, remaining quiet,  
 On entering that enchanting forest,  
 Never revealing itself to all those  
 Who try to find him.  
 If the breath fails to reach the empty cavern of the bee,  
 The manifested form remains hidden in the Void.  
 Above that is the Meru mountain, the axis of existence.  
 There shine the Sun and the Moon  
 Making possible the awareness of self—the *atman*.  
 Beyond Meru is the region of the dense forests  
 There reside the Prakritis  
 —the elements creating the being.  
 When the breath pushing upward targets that region,  
 The forests of illusion vanish,  
 And the deep waters of pure-consciousness flow in.  
 Yoga of the Yogins is only the ford—Madhubana  
 The garden of nectar,  
 Where the river of world existence is crossed.  
 The guardians of this ford are the two minds :  
 Chitra and Gupta,  
 The first manifest and active,  
 The second, unmanifest, secretive and ever resting.  
 Above that is the vital centre  
 —the circle of the crown of the head.

Look, my son, at the roots of that primordial tree,  
 By building a strong wall all around  
 You make the waters surround the roots,  
 And the roots keep cool and the tree lives.  
 On the tree are the birds  
 That ended the meditation of Ishwara, the God of Gods.

And thereafter my son  
 Use these revelations of *Amarakosha*  
 To cut down the six snares as also the snare of no-snare.  
 Take the sharpened five-pointed arrow

And pierce the veil of illusion,  
 Taking no notice of the wrenching noise,  
 By shutting off the ten doors of perception.  
 And then move through the body :  
 Only then will sing the Great Swan.  
 Above that is the soiled serpent,  
 Union with whom makes the leanest person the stoutest.  
 You will succeed in impounding the instincts  
 And even the consciousness of self.  
 Mind, memory, self and awareness of self :  
 All will become your prisoners.  
 There in the midst of the three anvils  
 Is the workplace of the Blacksmith.

Watch, my son,  
 The Blacksmith fashioning myriads of  
 Shapes, forms, structures, machines, instincts and cravings  
 Which you can neither count nor record:  
 Thus is found the knowledge of the body.

*Amarakosha*, c.14th century

Tr. by Rajendra Prasad Das

## Selections

### BALARAMA DAS

BALARAMA DAS (Balarāma Dās, 15th-16th century), born in 1470, was an inhabitant of Puri of Purushottama Kshetra. The most important of his works are *Jagamohan Ramayana*, *Lakshmi Purana* and *Brahmananda Bhugola*. *Jagamohan Ramayana*, though the theme is taken from the northern recension of the Ramayana of Valmiki, is regarded largely as an original composition, as it draws upon various other works on the Rama story. Balarama Das, along with Sarala Das and Jagannath Das, is one of the three greats of early Oriya literature. One excerpt from *Lakshmi Purana* and two excerpts from *Jagamohan Ramayana* are given below:

#### 1

### Lakshmi Purana

Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth and prosperity, grants to her sincere devotees riches without any discrimination of sex or caste. She visits the homes of her devotees and returns to her home, the Jagannath Temple, entering it without any purificatory rites or even a simple bath, even

when visiting the homes of outcastes. This irks Balabhadra, the elder brother of her husband Jagannath. The elder brother is the most respected person in a family, ranking next to the parents and has to be obeyed, unquestioningly. Balarama insists on driving Lakshmi out of their home because of her improper conduct. Jagannath protests saying that before taking such a step Lakshmi's guilt needs to be established. But Balabhadra does not relent and threatens to leave their home, if Lakshmi is not punished with banishment.

One day Lakshmi returns home straight from the house of her devotee Shriya, a scavenger woman, after granting her immense prosperity and many children. Lakshmi finds the two brothers barring her entry by sitting on the threshold of the entrance door. She requests them to stand aside so as to enable her to enter the house and cook. Here is that dialogue that follows:

"Are you crazy Lakshmi," asked Gobinda,  
 "Why did you go to the scavengers' street ?  
 Had I seen this alone, I might cover up,  
 But it is the elder brother who saw even before I did.  
 Go away, Lakshmi,  
 We have nothing further to do with you,  
 The elder brother has spoken bitterly:  
 'Lakshmi visits the homes of the scavengers and the like,  
 And re-enters the temple without even a simple cleansing bath.'  
 There can be no sinner greater than you on this earth.

Now listen to me, my dear:  
 The world calls you the crazy goddess,  
 Being my wife you go around like a crazy person,  
 Ruining a thousand homes, you enrich one,  
 Or, ruining one, you enrich a thousand,  
 Aren't you really gracious !  
 Please leave, you do not have to live here;  
 The elder brother is terribly annoyed with you."

Looking straight at the God, Lakshmi shot back:  
 "Divorce me first and then throw me out."

Jagannath looking at Lakshmi replied:  
 "In our caste there is no divorce,  
 Nor can we live with a woman we have given up."

Goddess Lakshmi argued:

"When you churned the ocean finding all the wealth and me,  
 Have you forgotten that my father Baruna  
 Chose you as my bridegroom and  
 After getting us married on the golden altar,  
 He sought your protection in exchange for me, his daughter,  
 And made you pledge to excuse my ten infractions,  
 Of the ten, you haven't tolerated even one and  
 Abused me by calling me a *Chandal* woman !  
 And have you also forgotten, O Lord,  
 That, when we played the customary game of dice  
 The day after our wedding,  
 Seven times did I spread the cowrie shells on the ground,  
 And each time you collected and placed them on my palms,  
 And when on one occasion I curled my fingers around a  
golden cowrie,  
 And you, the Lord of the Universe, could not loosen my grip,  
 You promised to grant me any boon I desired,  
 I responded folding my hands:  
 In eight days shall come the Thursday, sacred to me,  
 And I have to visit every household  
 From that of the smallest insect to that of the almighty Brahma  
 All have to receive their food from me,  
 You should not mind me visiting every home thus,  
 You graciously agreed.  
 Why are you breaking your pledge now ?"

Jagannath flew into a rage and shouted:

"Your salty father goes on roaring all the time,  
 You, his squint-eyed daughter, are full of evils beyond words,  
 To protect us from the terrible racket of your father,  
 We two brothers living in this temple,  
 Built this great wall touching the clouds all around our house."

Mahalakshmi looked the Lord in the face and said:

"I stood in the untouchable's house only for a moment,  
 And you drive me out calling me untouchable and mad,  
 You even dare questioning my lineage—caste, family and ancestry !  
 Because you are the Lord,  
 Your lineage is not questioned,  
 What of your own caste and family,  
 Didn't you two live in the home of a cowherd ?

You, Jagannath, even took food in the house of  
 Nima, the *siputi* and a bastard to boot,  
 You went to Hastina, the capital of the Kauravas, as a lowly messenger,  
 And dined at the place of Bidura, the son of a maid-servant.  
 And then there was Jara of the Shabara tribe,  
 Who worshipped you for ten or twelve years.  
 He would go into the jungle for fruits and roots,  
 And then put those into his mouth,  
 Testing each one  
 He would throw away the bitter and the pungent ones,  
 And retaining only the sweet ones, offer them to you,  
 How could this vanish from your memory ?  
 Having eaten polluted food and that too from a Shabara,  
 You are a sinner and yet you accuse another,  
 Without weighing the twin questions of sin and piety,  
 The husband has to bear with the faults of his wife,  
 Is a servant ever driven out for committing the same offence as the  
 master ?  
 My Lord, why don't you consider all these,  
 Instead of repeatedly ordering me to leave ?"

"I would grant you a daily ration measuring a pound,"  
 Said Jagannath, "And later bring you back  
 After interceding with the elder brother on your behalf.  
 Can I ever disobey the orders of my elder brother ?"

"I do not need your daily ration of food.  
 I am leaving you, as if I neither have a protector nor a provider.  
 But, please note, I am not the daughter of a helpless widow or a  
 lowly person,  
 I will go to my father,  
 But before that, please remove all these ornaments from my body,  
 Lest you shower further abuses on me."

"Have you lost your head, Lakshmi," asked Gobinda,  
 "Does a husband take off the ornaments of his wife ?"

Lakshmi shot back:

"I am your first wife.  
 You may later accuse me saying,  
 'Lakshmi was in my home,  
 And ran away with ornaments worth billions'.



To save myself from such a dishonour,  
 Please permit me to return these."  
 Saying this, Lakshmi removed the lace of pearls from her hair,  
 The *Indragobinda* brassiere from her bosom,  
 From her waist the belt studded with jewels,  
 The pearl-studs from the nose,  
 The diamond ear-rings from the ears,  
 The two strands of necklace made of gold beads from  
     around her neck;  
 Next the Goddess took off the tinkling Nupura anklets,  
 And the musical *jhuntia* rings from the toes.  
 What can one say of the rest of the ornaments ?  
 When heaped together, they were like the rising flames  
     of a raging fire.  
 Placing all the ornaments in one heap,  
 She said, "Keep all these, you the Lord of the destitutes."

"Oh, what use are these to me", asked Gobinda,  
 "I have no need for your ornaments.  
 For, when a husband parts from his wife,  
 He has to sign a deed providing for her food and clothes for six  
     months in a year.  
 Take these and by sale or barter, manage to have your  
     food and clothing."  
 Goddess Lakshmi looked at the Lord  
 And said:  
 "Listen carefully, O Lord of the Universe.  
 When you bring home another wife,  
 Please give her these ornaments.  
 I am leaving you. I know I am poor and helpless.  
 But Lord Bhavagrahi,  
 The one who cherishes the feelings,  
 Be pleased to accept this curse,  
 If the Sun and Moon really come and go,  
 You will remain poor for twelve years,  
 You will have no food, no water, no cloth,  
 Only when this *chandal* woman  
 Offers you food,  
 You, the one who subdued the Kaliya serpent,  
 Shall eat."

### The Story of Rishyasrunga

Unwavering the boat moved towards the destination.  
 Boatmen after finishing their meals had set to their tasks.  
 The hills and forests seemed moving along the river.  
 In the heavens the gods and sages were happy.  
 Night and day they journeyed without rest;  
 Crossing many thick forests and terrible mountains,  
 Moving through impenetrable woods,  
 They saw many strange things on the banks.  
 Somewhere an elephant tangled head on with another,  
 Its tusks entangled with those of the other.  
 At some place a tiger gave chase to a flock of deer,  
 Elsewhere the bear-cubs were at play.  
 At another the monkeys were leaping in joy seeing an elephant.  
 In one place copulating elephants separated seeing the boat.  
 At another, a lion, his whole body streaming with blood,  
 Tore apart an elephant.  
 Somewhere the wild bison trampled upon a snake.  
 Then at another, scared at the approach of a tiger,  
 A herd of cattle began fleeing for life.  
 Somewhere animals standing on the banks  
 With their eyes fixed on the flowing river  
 Saw the approaching boat,  
 And as the boat moved along the river,  
 They too moved on the banks,  
 Showing off their prowess.  
 Some other animals, frightened at the sight of the boat,  
 Hid themselves in the thicket.  
 Some left the banks all the time looking backwards.  
 Some would move away,  
 Only to come back looking for the boat.  
 At one place a herd of yaks  
 Approaching the river for a drink  
 Stood still on seeing the boat,  
 Only to be attacked by a tiger.  
 At one place a family of cats quarrelled.  
 At another, packs of white mongooses gave chase to flying squirrels.  
 Somewhere else, peacocks were dancing,  
 Their many-hued brilliant tails spread out like fans.  
 Somewhere droves of wild pigeon

Whirled overhead in great circles.  
 An animal barking deep in the forest  
 Produced the sound of the ritual *hula-huli*.  
 A Gayala standing on hill-top, surveying the surroundings,  
 Saw the boat and came running to the river bank.  
 And then at another place,  
 A pack of wild dogs were chasing a rhino,  
 And seeing the boat, both parties stood stock-still in surprise.  
 Geese, ducks, cormorants, swans and many other birds  
 Looking for food in the river,  
 Saw the approaching boat  
 And took to their wings.  
 Some left their nests and flew away,  
 Some sank into the water to guard their nests,  
 Some stayed on the surface of the water protecting their eggs,  
 Some circled the boat shrieking,  
 returning to the water after the boat passed.  
 On some stretches of the river  
 Great thickets of lotus plants  
 Were so torn to pieces by the moving boat,  
 One could not bear to have a look.  
 The passengers of the boat,  
 Had the finest food,  
 Rice of the finest quality and ripe fruits,  
 Happy, their days filled with songs and dance,  
 They anchored in deep waters during the night.  
 And moved after a restful night, at the crack of the dawn,  
 Thus after twenty days, they arrived on the banks of Kaushika river.

From *Adi Kanda*,  
*Jagamohan Ramayana*, 15th-16th century

Tr. by Rajendra Prasad Das

### 3

#### Hanuman Comes to Ravana's Palace

Failing to locate Sati, the virtuous one,  
 Hanumanta, the son of wind-god,  
 Proceeded towards the king's palace,  
 And entered, assuming the form of a rat,  
 Like jumping into fire without fearing death.  
 The palace complex was beautiful;

One of the houses was of gold,  
 Another encrusted with jewels of eight varieties,  
 Some other was of glass,  
 Another ornamented with emeralds,  
 One was a structure of transparent crystal.  
 Maruti was full of admiration for the builder:  
 "You, king of Lanka, deserve all praise for your grand taste".  
 Inside, he found at one place  
 Heaps of fragrant sandalwood,  
 In another room were mounds of gold,  
 Heaps of silver here and copper there,  
 In one room were caskets filled with incense,  
 In another, ornaments inlaid with the nine jewels.  
 One room had a large collection of fine clothes,  
 Boxes overflowing with fine silk,  
 At some other place, packets of camphor and sweet-smelling herbs,  
 Huge cases filled with oil  
 And heaps of musk elsewhere.  
 At one place were stored fragrant powders.  
 Houses furnished splendidly;  
 Some with thick rugs covering the floor,  
 Others with bedsteads and swings,  
 Some with bed cushions of soft downs of swans,  
 Some rooms had curtained partitions,  
 Others with patchwork canopies and  
 Yet others with finely carved balconies.  
 Some rooms sported white fly-whisks  
 Suspended along glistening mirrors attached to walls.  
 Another had walls painted in bright red saffron;  
 Somewhere else long golden sticks decorated the facades.  
 Some walls were painted in dark musk.  
 Some rooms made fragrant with burning resins,  
 Some rooms had walls inlaid with all the eight jewels.  
 All rooms were lit with lamps and torches placed in niches  
 and tended by young women.  
 All these filled Hanumanta with great joy  
 And he was all praise for Ravana.

And then, in the middle of a garden  
 He came upon a house three *yojanas* long and two *yojanas* wide

With steps of ruby and pillars of blue sapphire  
 Standing on an emerald platform finished with a course of red coral.  
 The beams were of yellow sapphire:  
 The central crosspieces made of red *kurubinda*,  
 Rafters of sapphire with end-planks of diamond,  
 All the crosspieces tied with ropes of silk,  
 The roof of golden tiles,  
 Walls washed with pearl-lime  
 Twelve auspicious water pots as finials on the central ridge of the  
     sloping roof,  
 Each *kalasa* finial of a different colour,  
 Silk flags and white and red festoons crowning them  
 Moving in unison stirred by the wind,  
 Inside, a huge white canopy,  
 Encrusted with gems of all the nine varieties,  
 Bathing the interior with the gold of moonbeams,  
 All around fly-whisk of different hues,  
 Streamers, festoons and curtains of fine silk fit for gods,  
 Strings of pearl and ruby hanging down,  
 The whole interior fragrant with burning incense  
 Golden sculptures against walls of crystal  
 Depicting the sixty-four varieties of sexual union,  
 And in the centre,  
 The sandal-wood bedstead bright as the autumn-moon,  
 It had emerald legs topped by statues of ruby,  
 Curtain-posts of ivory and strings of pearls suspended from above  
 The head-board of blue sapphire supported on globes of diamond  
 Glistening like a million stars in the sky,  
 And on the bed, three layers of soft silk mattresses,  
 Several pillows and cushions of brilliantly-red silk,  
 The bed cover, all white, had flowers and camphor powder  
 spread upon it,  
 On that bed lay king Ravanaesvara,  
 With Queen Mandodari in his lap,  
 Attended by several young women,  
 Some holding knives and swords,  
 Others waiving flywhisks and fans,  
 Some holding lighted torches,  
 Some creating a fragrant breeze by waving fans of flowers.  
 One damsel, with lips red as the ripe *bimba* fruit, held the sandals;  
 Another combing the king's tresses;  
 Yet another standing on guard with a naked *parigha* in her hand,

One standing by with a jar full of fragrant water;  
 One feeding the lamp with wicks,  
 One neatly arranging the clothes freshly delivered by the washerman,  
 One just standing at attention in front to carry out the king's orders,  
 One waiting with a mirror,  
 Some preparing garlands:  
 This way the maids ministered the royal needs.  
 Some sang sweetly and played on the musical instruments,  
 Others kept the beat by slowly striking the cymbals,  
 Some delineated a tune, measuring the beats,  
 Some rendered songs set to the *Gundakeri* raga,  
 Some taught the mynas and the parakeets,  
 Some women were deep in sleep,  
 Some resting against curtains,  
 Red betel-juice oozing out,  
 Some massaged the feet and others cracked the toes  
     easing their stiffness  
 Some withdrew from the king's presence walking backwards,  
 And then, Hanumanta entered the royal chamber  
 Assuming the visage of a dwarf.

From *Sundar Kanda, Jagamohan Ramayana*,  
 15th-16h century

Tr. by Rajendra  
 Prasad Das

## Shiva and Parvati

BACCHA DAS

BACCHA DAS (Bacchā Dās) is generally considered as a poet of the 15th century. As there are no references available about his time in his own work and in the works of other poets of the period, some scholars put him prior to Sarala Das, whereas others consider him as a poet of the post-Sarala age. The only work discovered so far is *Kalasha Chautisha*, wherein he describes the marriage of Shiva and Parvati. In this poem Shiva has been depicted as a very old man. The marriage of an old man with a beautiful young lady like Parvati poses a problem in the family. All present in the marriage festival, including the mother of the bride, criticise the father of the bride for selecting such an old man without knowing anything about his caste and heritage. The salient feature of the poem is its humour.

Thus spoke the maidens,  
 O daughter of the abode of snows,  
 From somewhere your father has brought a groom  
 Of unknown family and kin relations,  
 The old one sitting in the middle of the marriage pavilion.

Cough and laboured asthmatic breathing,  
 With each breath the old head touches the ground  
 The incomplete yogi, he has no vehicles,  
 A single bull is tied beside him.

His hands and legs pale, his eyes watering,  
 On his cheeks are hanging bulging rings,  
 He has lost all sense, his mind pointless,  
 Without qualities, signs of excellence, the old man is motionless.

His home country is not known;  
 God has brought such a one here :  
 Saliva oozing out from his mouth,  
 His head adorned with matted hair.

He does not recognise people, does not see,  
 Near-sighted, deaf in both ears,  
 His nails, face, eyes all sunken,  
 His belly like a freshly excavated pit.

The old one is sitting on a leather mat  
 Surrounding him are Gods and the Brahmins;  
 Astonished to see his deformed visage  
 We are certainly immersed in worry.

His scratched body covered with torn clothes,  
 His body smeared with ashes,  
 His head intertwined with snakes:  
 The old one has charmed everybody with magic.

O moon-faced one, you are wedded to a wanderer !  
 God has written it in your forehead.  
 You are entitled to enjoy your youth  
 A wanderer you are married to, out of choice.

With the jingling sound of a bunch of bells.  
*The glittering trident in his hand*  
 He is swinging and falling asleep.  
 You look like his daughter, even grand-daughter.

Tired while speaking, words uttered with *sarled teeth*  
*The entrails pulled out while uttering a word.*

Unshaven moustache and beard, he finds no barber  
Meeting him at night one will die of fright.

Unstable, he cannot sit straight  
Cheeks sunken, toothless,  
His two ears are reddish.  
He is friendless, profane and protectionless.

All the riches assembled from begging  
He had promised your father the king;  
He has cheated him even of that.  
O daughter of the Snow King, you are finished.

His begging bowl makes noise in his shoulder bag.  
You will make home with the stick of a man,  
You worshipped the one who plays *dambaru*,  
He gave you a groom like a stick.

You gave your mind to the one in meditation.  
You got a begging Yogi as groom  
I am speaking not in riddles, telling the truth;  
The daughter of the Snow King is verily finished.

From somewhere the king brought a groom:  
Half-man, hapless and profane.  
After preparation, the mother and the daughter  
Went aside to look from a secret position.

As though a sharp arrow struck the heart  
The girl swooned in her room;  
The attending maids plucked her from the ground  
The mother was instantly at her side.

The mother speaks in a broken voice:  
Listen, my daughter, without losing sense.  
So far you were my daughter,  
I am giving you away as you have attained youth.

O my mother! I speak with All humility:  
I prostrate before you with straw in teeth.  
If you give me to the poor dilapidated old man,  
Before your eyes you will see my death.



Mother and daughter cried in embrace  
 There was *consternation* among maids and friends  
 The king came running at that instant:  
 Why are you crying on such an auspicious and festive occasion ?

From *Kalasha Chautisha*, 15th century

Tr. by D.P. Pattanaik

## To the Cuckoo

MARKANDA DAS

MARKANDA DAS, the poet of "Keshaba Koili" is generally considered as a poet of the 15th century. In this poem Yashoda, the mother of Krishna, expresses her sorrow on separation from her beloved son Krishna, before a cuckoo.

- Cuckoo !      Keshaba has left for Mathura.  
                     With whose permission did he leave ?  
                     He did not return, O cuckoo !
- Cuckoo !      To whom shall I give sugarcandy with milk ?  
                     The child who eats it has left.  
                     He has left for Mathura, O cuckoo !
- Cuckoo !      The son left, did not return,  
                     The deep woods of Vrindabana  
                     Has lost its lustre, O cuckoo !
- Cuckoo !      This house is not home for Nanda.  
                     This house is not beautiful  
                     Without Govinda, O cuckoo !
- Cuckoo !      Nanda is made of stone.  
                     He put collyrium in the eyes of his son,  
                     Made him climb the chariot, O cuckoo !
- Cuckoo !      The sweet sound of the moving bells in the waist:  
                     The women of Gopa were  
                     Surprised to hear it, O cuckoo !
- Cuckoo !      Sometime in the past I hit him with a stick  
                     Krishna has left me  
                     For that one mistake, O cuckoo !

- Cuckoo !      Akrura came as messenger  
He cheated saying it was a festival  
He took Krishna away in a chariot, O cuckoo !
- Cuckoo !      Tears did not stop pining for him.  
After settling his score,  
Krishna stayed at Mathura, O cuckoo !
- Cuckoo !      At night Hari asked for the moon  
Raising his eye upwards;  
Nanda asked it to drop down, O cuckoo !
- Cuckoo !      He laughed sitting on the lap;  
He was unstable  
While swinging, O cuckoo !
- Cuckoo !      Both the sons are handsome !  
Krishna deceived and went away.  
Did not return once, O cuckoo !
- Cuckoo !      He calls like a parakeet,  
Hari speaks like  
The Jewel of the branch parrot, O cuckoo !
- Cuckoo !      Mother Jasovanti smothered him;  
In a jiffy I lost  
My son Shripati, O cuckoo !
- Cuckoo !      King Kamsa was jealous;  
Through neglect  
He destroyed himself, O cuckoo !
- Cuckoo !      He smears vermilion on his body;  
The little one was made to play  
By his brother Balaram, O cuckoo !
- Cuckoo !      I nourished my child with my own milk;  
In my old age  
I could not see him, O cuckoo !
- Cuckoo !      I tied him with a rope;  
Damodara left  
In anger, O cuckoo !

- Cuckoo ! Praise be to Devaki:  
The son graced by Dharma  
Became her son, O cuckoo !
- Cuckoo ! The Gopapura not looked beautiful  
Since the day  
Narayana left for Mathura, O cuckoo !
- Cuckoo ! My Madhoi is a sacred being;  
I used to be sacred  
Observing Krishna's face, O cuckoo !
- Cuckoo ! There is no hope of my pregnancy;  
The fruit of my pregnancy  
Has gone to Basudeva, O cuckoo !
- Cuckoo ! I tolerated lots of mischief  
By breaking affectionate relationship;  
Banamali left for Mathura, O cuckoo !
- Cuckoo ! Both sons left me cheating;  
Brother Balaram  
Did not come even once, O cuckoo !
- Cuckoo ! Shall I run to Mathura,  
Shall I lead back  
Madhava and Madhusudana, O cuckoo !
- Cuckoo ! He went to come back;  
The life of the universe,  
The Lord did not return, O cuckoo !
- Cuckoo ! Gems, clothes and ornaments:  
They look beautiful  
On the body of Rama Krishna, O cuckoo !
- Cuckoo ! Narayan is blessed,  
With great affection; Gargaba,  
The brahmin, named him as such, O cuckoo !
- Cuckoo ! My Brindaban no longer looks beautiful  
Who will keep cows  
On the banks of the Yamuna, O cuckoo !

- Cuckoo !      My Madhoi is the lucky one,  
Nanda has gone mad,  
Ever since Shriranga left Gopa, O cuckoo !
- Cuckoo !      As the moon wanes day by day  
Nanda Rajan became thin  
Each day, O cuckoo !
- Cuckoo !      Indra rained for seven days;  
My seven-year old son  
Lifted Mandara, O cuckoo:
- Cuckoo !      My son opened his mouth while yawning;  
Inside of him was seen  
The seven worlds, O cuckoo !
- Cuckoo !      May the knotting rope and the churning stick  
Pardon all my mistakes !  
Says Markanda, O cuckoo !

From *Keshaba Koili*, 15th century

Tr. by D.P. Pattanaik

## Bhagavata

JAGANNATH DAS

JAGANNATH DAS (Jagannāth Dās, 1490-1550) was born in the village of Kapileswarapura, some ten kilometers to the west of Puri. An erudite scholar and interpreter of Sanskrit scriptures, he was a fast friend of Shri Chaitanya who honoured him with the title of *Atibadi*, "the great".

Most popular among a distinguished group of poet-philosophers—the Pancha Sakhas, or Five Mates, as they are called—Jagannath authored a number of works in Sanskrit and Oriya; but his principal title to fame rests upon the *Bhagavata*.

With its simple lyricism and aphoristic excellence it exerted a great impact on the religious, cultural and literary life of the Oriyas. Composed in the nine-lettered line it blended Sanskrit and colloquial Oriya elements and perfected a syncretic model that has retained its pre-eminence till today. Like Tulsidas' *Ram Charit Manas* in certain areas in the north, Jagannath's *Bhagavata* used to be worshipped as a holy book, recited daily, and referred to as the ultimate court of appeal in matters ethical and spiritual through all the villages and towns of Orissa till very recent times.

Jagannath was no mere skilled translator and versifier. He inducted into the *Bhagavata* a number of illustrative stories from other Puranas and freely engaged in dramatic elaboration and philosophical-mystical expositions in certain markedly individual ways. Although he gave precedence to devotional fervour, ethical passion and spiritual wisdom over literary beauty, his keen sensitivity to human passions, his simple and clear figures of speech, homely expressions, realistic-dramatic touches, and limpid grace of narration elevate the *Bhagavata* to the heights of great religious poetry.

The following three excerpts, illustrative of Jagannath's dramatic, lyric and philosophic modes of narration, offer a representative fare:

1

### The Autumnal Dance of Rasa

Hear, O Pariksha, king of men,  
 Hear the story of Krishna, the Bhagavata.  
 Thought he to himself, Lord Govinda,  
 Sport we would upon Brindaban to-day.  
 The sixty-thousand dames of Gopa,  
 Reaping the fruits of long penance,  
 Have set their hearts upon me;  
 Today shall I requite their passion.  
 They, my trusting devotees,  
 Engaged in austerities for countless births,  
 Are born as maidens of Gopa;  
 To them shall I grant my estate,  
 Dally with them and impart ecstasy.  
 Reflecting thus, he, Banamali, took up the flute,  
 The flute that enthrals with pangs of separation.

Thrilling was the hour,  
 With autumnal sweetness filled,  
 Soothed with a pure breeze.  
 The moon went up the sky,  
 A clear night reigned,  
 Flowers on land and water  
 Shook their petals free,  
 Fragrant, cool and rich beyond measure,  
 The Lord of the gopis rejoiced to see  
 The unbroken halo of the moon,  
 The face of Lakshmi that made  
 All ten quarters happy with her sheen,

Sitting upon the banks of Kalindi,  
 Beneath the boughs of *kadamba*,  
 Spread the Lord Supreme his cover of magic,  
 And ordered the night to stretch.  
 "Be thou a celestial night", he said,  
 "Cherished for a thousand epochs".  
 Took up he then his posture of triple dance,  
 And put the flute to his lips.  
 Softly it trilled the names of the cowherd-dames.  
 Each lass in her home at Gopa,  
 Heard at once the sweet summons,  
 Kept still, and heard,  
 The flute call out her name.

Ravished, in sweet agitation,  
 They stood distracted, rooted to the ground,  
 Shaking with keen longing.  
 All the sixty-thousand cowherd women  
 Did thus Banamali charm with his melody.  
 Breathless rushed out the dames,  
 Each in urgent secrecy,  
 Loath to share the joy of union,  
 Craving to be the first, the only one,  
 To reach the woods of Brindaban,  
 To possess in full the lad of Nanda,  
 To drink him in with the eyes,  
 The one whose flute now sounded her name.

"Why does he call in the night thus,  
 Standing beneath the *kadamba* tree ?  
 He stole up at our bathing spree,  
 And picked away all the clothes.  
 Shedding our shame at his word,  
 We went up to fetch our sarees.  
 Knowing our hearts be pure,  
 The carrier of the disc<sup>1</sup> said, laughing,  
 'The lover you have begged for,  
 Worshipping deities upon the river bank,  
 Shall be yours.  
 He has recalled the pledge to mind,  
 Shall redeem it today,  
 And free us of all shame.

Yet how should we go this hour of the night,  
Shaking off husband and child ?  
But death it would be not to go;  
Undoes us all this music of the flute".  
So thought the gopis and started off,  
Trembling in passion.  
One was milking a cow, tying the calf in a careful knot;  
The flute then pierced her ears,  
Hearing the call of Krishna,  
She dropped it all, and ran toward Brindaban.  
Another, as she skimmed the milk,  
Heard the sweet flute intoning her name,  
Away she rushed with nimble feet.  
Another, as she was mixing the curd,  
Heard and ran with quickening pace.  
Another, when she heard the flute,  
Left her milk boiling and hastened away.  
One held her boy in her lap,  
Singing as she fed him milk.  
Heard she the flute trilling her name.  
Driven by pangs of love  
Dropped she the child on the floor,  
And bolted out of doors.

Sitting upon the bed as she shampooed her husband's feet,  
A gopi heard the flute,  
Warbling out an urgent bidding.  
Straight she laid the feet aside,  
And ran away wild with love.  
Half way through her meal,  
Another heard the flute:  
"Come quickly", it called,  
"Meet your Krishna in the woods".  
She rose at once, wouldn't even wash her hands,  
And fled to Brindaban, where piped the flute.  
Some other maid sat plastering the floor  
When she heard the melodious flute:  
"Come over", it enticed, "come to Brindaban;  
Consort with Hari in the deep woods".  
Up she sprang, and raced towards Brindaban.

Another sat at home, collyrium-box in hand,  
 Smearing the unguent in the first eye,  
 She heard the flute sound her name;  
 Away she fled, amour-filled, :  
 Holding still the unguent case.  
 Disrobed was another,  
 Anointing her body with *kumkum* paste,  
 Caught in her ears the melody of the flute,  
 And up she stood, distraught in passion,  
 Absently picked the saree from the floor,  
 And wrapped it around her shoulders.  
 Hard to tell, thus,  
 Of all the sixty-thousand.  
 Not all could flee unchecked.  
 Their kids pursued, and husbands blocked their path.  
 In-laws, uncles, brothers, cousins,  
 Friends, well-wishers,  
 Walled their ways.  
 Accosted and admonished thus:

"You do wrong, O women of Gopa,  
 Mustn't move into the woods at night.  
 Are you all lost to shame,  
 Grown brazen-faced all?"

Pleaded the gopis fervently:  
 "Banamali is on visitation,  
 There in the forest;  
 Harken, O you all, to his notes.  
 Hear you not the ravishing flute ?  
 We'll but listen to the music awhile,  
 And return anon."

Lover of his devotees, the Lord,  
 Charmed then the minds of the cowherds.  
 Speechless and meek,  
 They went back to their homes.  
 Frail and slow,  
 Lagged behind a cowherd dame.  
 Hailed her home the angry husband,  
 Bound her down in the innermost room,  
 Flogged her and bolted the door.



There she stayed, crying in agony.  
 Yet the flute called her name,  
 "Hasten, O come," it shrilled.  
 Bound and hapless, the poor thing,  
 Beat her head against the pillar.  
 Fixing then her mind in Krishna's form,  
 She swooned in deep endearment,  
 Again and again.  
 Faint with the heat of separation then,  
 She stilled her eyes, and sank into a reverie,  
 Saw the Lord within,  
 And clasped him in ecstasy.

Journeying through the night,  
 The cowherd dames,  
 Reached the *kadamba* tree.  
 All the sixty-thousand,  
 Beheld there Lord Banamali,  
 Decked in myriad flowers,  
 A garland of wild flowers hanging down his bosom,  
 A string of *gunjura*-beads,  
 Encircling the head and tuft of hair,  
 With pendants of pearl upon the ears,  
 Shining bracelets and anklets,  
 A belt of gems adorning the waist,  
 Yellow-robed, and flute in hand,  
 With compact, reddened lips,  
 Surpassing a million gods of love.  
 marvelled the women of Braja to see the Form.  
 Then they rushed,  
 Eager as insects toward a torch.  
 Milled they round in a hundred circles,  
 Tremulous, gazing upon Krishna.

## 2

## The Rains

Past were the days of summer,  
 Spread itself forth the season of rains,  
 Best of all seasons,  
 That fills the earth-plane with a dower of crops.

Clouds coursed along the skyey path,  
 Flashing and rumbling.  
 The cosmic form of massed blue,  
 Stretched across the land, air, and sea.  
 Into the close sky,  
 For eight months long,  
 The sun had sucked the sap of the earth.  
 Watching the sorrows upon the earthly region,  
 Graciously released the showers.  
 Masses of loud-throated cloud,  
 Roared as they poured down;  
 Rained they in compassion,  
 Torrents of water, the life of the living.  
 Swallowed up in the blaze of the sun,  
 The earth that had lain scorched,  
 Received the water in deep contentment,  
 Savouring delightedly, like ascetics  
 Who have acquired the fruits of their penance.

Blithely upon early evenings,  
 Fireflies covered the earth.  
 Hearing the clouds rumble,  
 Frogs croaked loudly, keeping to the waters,  
 As infidels do in the iron age,  
 Denouncing the Vedas and the Yogic path.  
 Small rivers swelled up,  
 And rippled out beyond the banks.  
 The earth looked full,  
 Covered with numerous crops.  
 Mushrooms went up as royal umbrellas.  
 And kingly looked the earth.  
 Riches of crops as befit the fields,  
 Filled with joy the minds of men.  
 Creatures without number on land and in water.  
 Gleefully drank in,  
 Grew stronger day by day,  
 Belike the devotees of Hari.  
 Seeking the concourse of rivers,  
 The seas went brimming,  
 As minds of neophytes do,  
 With distractions besieged.  
 Hills stood unafraid,

Lashed by torrents of rain,  
As creatures that have surrendered to Krishna keep firm,  
Under misfortunes sorrowing not.  
Covered over with grass,  
The pathways got lost;  
Like Brahmins who have forgotten the Vedas,  
Feeling confounded and lost.  
Amid the world's friends, the cloud masses,  
Lightning kept not still,  
Restive it was like the mind of a debauch,  
When put amid virtuous folk.  
The rumble on the heels of the rainbow,  
Bright against the sky in seven stripes,  
In the company of the righteous ones,  
Full of noise debased creature.  
The moon was hid behind the clouds,  
As truth is by false speech.  
Peacocks upon the hills,  
Danced at the sight of the clouds,  
As good men feel gladdened,  
When reach their doors some unexpected guests.  
Fruits and leaves upon trees,  
Swayed in thanksgiving for the water upon their roots.  
Content as ascetics,  
On fruition of pieties,  
Joyously retired indoors,  
The men and women at the sight of the rains.  
Embankments gave way to coursing water,  
As the Vedic path to renegades.  
Swelled with the wind, the clouds,  
Released the nectarine flood,  
As kings lavish charities,  
Egged on by solicitous Brahmins.  
With the juice of the rains the forest wild,  
Burst with dates and palms.  
Consorting with cowherds and cattle,  
The Lord then appeared in the woods.  
The cows that with heavy udders,  
Struggled through the mud,  
Hearing the call of Krishna,  
Rushed at once to Him.  
Animals of the forest, all,  
Repaired unto hilly woods.

Shepherds, the cattle in Brindaban, the Lord,  
Tasting of the root of the wild.  
Sitting beneath the trees,  
Spent the days of rain.  
Upon some rock near a stream,  
Spread the packet of curd and rice.  
Merrily with the cowherd boys,  
Partook of the food the two brothers.  
With closed eyes then lay the cattle,  
Stretched out on the soft green grass.

3

Avadhuta's Preceptors

Turning slowly his gaze  
Upon the face of the king,  
Spoke the sage in solemn tones:  
"Hear me, O King of the Yadus,  
Many, indeed, are my preceptors.  
If you wish to hear,  
The wisdom I have gleaned from each,  
Carrying which I traverse the earth,  
Be composed and closely attend.  
Earth, air, water and fire,  
A boy-child, the sky, and the sun,  
Moon, elephant, and ocean,  
Pigeon, butterfly, and the python,  
Fish, and pingala, the harlot,  
The bird *kurara*<sup>1</sup> and a Brahmin-maid,  
The deer, the spider, the snake,  
The maker of arrows, and the bee,  
The honey-collector and the insect *pesakruta*<sup>2</sup>  
These, verily, have been my teachers,  
Twenty-four in all.

"Listen, O king, with a serene mind,  
The instruction that I had from each.

1. A bird of prey.
2. An insect that is supposed to seal its prey within a mould; the prey, continually thinking of its captor in fear is believed to get metamorphosed into the same species as the captor.

The soul that has entered this being,  
Born upon this earth, through fruits of action,  
Besieged with grief,  
In the faith of an Invisible Maker,  
Yields to fate, and suffers pain,  
Yet shuns it never,  
Firm not to stray from his wonted path,  
Allowing not the mind to grow restive:  
Thus do I endure joy and pain.  
Thus have I learnt from the earth;  
Calmly bearing all pains of action,  
I voyage through the sea of life.  
That one who lives for the good of others,  
His life, indeed, is blessed;  
Wonderful his life, of rare virtue his acts;  
This I learned in the world of the trees,  
Deep amid the hills.  
Do you only keep to the body,  
Offer not yourself to the senses;  
Shroud not the mind pure,  
In delusions of matter. For wisdom live,  
Moved not by merits and failings of others;  
Finding little joy in sensual pleasure;  
From enticements of false delight,  
Keeping away ever.  
Observe now, this breath in the body,  
That blows inside and out,  
Courses through the body whole,  
Airing off odours.  
Thus it keeps to the bodies all,  
An unconcerned, neutral thing.  
Informs all beings in equal measure,  
Attached to none.  
Such the lesson I imbibed from the air,  
Taking it for my tutor.  
So I live as the air,  
Close to all, yet detached from all.  
Look how the cloud,  
Issuing out of emptiness,  
Covers the sky with its body.  
Men on earth see the silhouette;  
The sky absorbs it not.

Thus does the soul live with the body,  
 But blends not itself, ever.  
 So I took the sky as my mentor,  
 And so I move through the world in joy,  
 Keeping to this body, yet untouched by all.  
 Hence it is that the sky is my preceptor.  
 "Now further list, O King," said the sage.  
 The word thus spoken, sweet and in good taste,  
 Delighted all. Continued he:  
 "Men on pilgrimage,  
 Thrill to the touch of holy places;  
 Feel absolved and sanctified,  
 With purifying bath, worship and chants.  
 Gained I wisdom from the experience,  
 And took initiation from the water.  
 So I move through the world-forest,  
 As on pilgrimage, seeking the salvation of all men.  
 Look you on my physique,  
 Bright, shining and robust,  
 The stomach for my only bowl;  
 Hence am I feared of men.  
 I partake of food from every hearth,  
 Through the yoga of meditation alone.  
 Thus I wander in the body,  
 Going through the world,  
 With fire for my preceptor,  
 The fire that feeds upon all,  
 Choosing neither good nor bad."

From *Bhagavata*, 15th-16th century

Tr. by Madhusudan Pati

## Mahabharata

SARALA DAS

SARALA DAS (Sarala Dās, 15th-16th century), the father of Oriya poetry, was born in a community of farmers in the village Jhankada, situated about thirty miles to the east of Cuttack. He composed his magnum opus, *Mahabharata*, during the reign of the great Kapilendra Dev (1435-65). Sarala Das imparted to his native tongue a high literary stature, wielding it with extraordinary self-confidence and virtuosity.

Sarala's originality was not confined to his use of a literarily undeveloped language in weaving epic poems of great length. With an assured innovativeness

he reorganised his source material to structure new and distinctive patterns of experience, modifying character, adding numerous fresh episodes, effecting a thorough-going cultural nativisation of the tale, and displaying an unconstrained imaginative exuberance. His *Mahabharata*, therefore, acquires the status of a true and independent Oriya classic, despite its basic narrative allegiance to Vyasa's Sanskrit composition. It is written in a free-flowing metre, called *Dandibrutta*, which is akin to prose and quite suitable to reading and recitation in the villages, and in a colloquial style typical of the time.

The following excerpt relates to the episode of Duryodhana's (whom Sarala generally referred to as Managobinda) crossing of the river of blood after the fearful carnage of the final days of the battle of Kurukshetra:

O Chaitana,  
As silence fell upon the field of Kurukshetra,  
Emerg'd Managobinda from under the mighty bell.  
Stood he, Managobinda, to the east of the river of blood.  
Climb'd he the auspicious column rais'd for the Bharata war.  
Watching the river of blood, the king, Managobinda,  
Beat his forehead, surveying all around.  
"O Destiny", he cried,  
"I gain'd such a fortune, so vast,  
On the strength of my merits of previous birth,  
And sank it all in a trifle, such be my feeble fate".

Sat there lamenting, the king of the Kurus, atop the auspicious pillar,  
Saw he then floating down the carcass of Duhshasana.  
Drew it he close into his lap, the proud monarch,  
And fell to mourning.  
"O brother mine, Duhshasana, the one great fighter on the earth,  
O dear young lad, Duhshasana,  
Virtuous, righteous, brave, and wise,  
Foremost honoured in the world of warriors.  
O dear boy, you hauled Draupadi by the hair,  
And stripp'd her in the pit of the great court.  
O dear youth, pulled you down the city of the *nishadas* and  
plundered the gem,  
Humbled the might and conceit of the demon, Keshi.  
O my dear, both your hands are gone, Bhima uprooted them for  
Draupadi's joy.  
The bracelet that fell off your hand gave passage to  
hundreds of elephants.  
Dear boy, your lofty banner proclaimed quashing of enemy-pride.  
Through thirty-six regions and twelve nations was your glory admired.

Not for a moment, dear lad, would you brook a slight to my honour,  
 You whose feet churned the enemy lines, O Duhshasana.  
 Your splendour witnessed all the three worlds,  
 Adept you were in the game of love,  
 a love-god you were to the maids  
 Where dear boy, did you put by all those virtues and pledges,  
 And now come floating, stretched upon this river of blood?  
 What use have I, dear, for this life of mine?  
 Shameless am I to be thus alive, allowing you to perish.  
 O dear youth, heaves this river of blood, rippling into the sky,  
 How should I cross this bloody flood?  
 Little of the night is left to sing your virtues,  
 Would you, my brother, bear me across this stream of blood?"  
 Flung himself he, the king, upon Duhshasana, the support of a raft,  
 And went down, helpless, fathoms three.  
 Saw he again floating down the mighty Karna,  
 Spreading a bright sheen across the river of blood,  
 The cadaver radiant like a rising sun.  
 Gathered he the body into his arms, the lord of the Kurus:

"Alas, alas, friend, all five elements of my being,  
 You were, indeed, the eldest of Kunti's sons,  
 Yet spurned you your brothers, my friend, and held fast to me,  
 Heeded not the words of Kunti, you, gem of heroes.  
 The Sun-god who fathered you armoured your body at birth,  
 Nectar-filled ear-pendant, amulet of heavenly bolt,  
 Impenetrable magic hide beneath the skin,  
 With all these rendered you secure, the god who makes the day.  
 Your steps were a torment to the goddess of the earth.  
 She bled at her mouth when you stamped.  
 Not able to bear the weight of your tread, worshipped you  
     she each day,  
 With a hundred load of gold; your heart ever melted to see the  
     hapless folk,  
 At your charities you gifted away daily precious metal a  
     hundred load.  
 Indra it was who begged you in the habit of a Brahmin,  
 Gave you away the amulet, ring and hide.  
 Govinda, too, begged you in the garb of a Brahmin,  
 You sacrificed Bisikesana, your son, to satisfy him:  
 Your largesse indeed, was vast, O friend;  
 Do you allow me to sink?  
 Why don't you find some means to save me now?  
 You who supported me long, O friend;



Tell me how I should cross this current of blood.  
 O friend, mighty in your charities, mighty in war,  
 You are talked of through all the seven seas, the nine continents.  
 Limitless your virtues; no time to recount them now;  
 Perchance if the son of the wind-god gets to know,  
 I perish with the break of day".

He stretched himself above then, embracing Karna's frame,  
 But sank the corpse deep in the river of blood.  
 He, Managobinda, gave up and turned in haste.  
 Espied he then ahead the cadaver of Drona:  
 "Alas, O Master", wailed the chief of the Kurus,  
 "Your lesson it was that made us warriors great.  
 The art you had acquired in service of Parashurama,  
 Made you invincible and strong,  
 God Indra could not himself oppose you in battle;  
 You loved Arjuna beyond all measure;  
 He it was, O pity, who undid you later.  
 Son of Bharadvaja, Brahmin, superior,  
 Excelling in the four Vedas, at sacrifices courted,  
 Famed, moreover, as teacher great,  
 Lord Brahma quailed as you chanted prayers to the goddess.  
 Yet killed the Pandavas so lofty, so holy a teacher-father.  
 For my sake, O Master, wielded you a bow of eighty thousand weights,  
 Resolved to put the Pandavas all to death.  
 Why are you grown so unkind now, speaking not to me ?  
 Your virtues were endless: no time have I to relate them now.  
 I die when the night ends, should the Pandavas come to know."

Holding the body in his lap, did Managobinda pray again and again,  
 And lay on top, hugging it close;  
 But sank the teacher down full fathoms three.  
 Leapt he, Managobinda, back to his former place,  
 Astonished he stood, the king of the Kurus, watching  
     the river of blood.  
 Piqued, he turned back, moving in deep disdain,  
 And then saw Shakuni, his minister chief, helplessly cursing down.  
 Drew the corpse to his lap, the haughty monarch;

"Alas, alas" he cried, "dear uncle, minister who knew all  
     past and future,  
 All those plots you cunningly wove, keen to see the  
     Pandavas dead,



Yet supported the corpse that colossal weight.  
 Flung himself face downward on it the king,  
 Yet it held, floating as a raft of reed,  
 And sank not down in the river of blood.  
 Astride upon the carcass, oared the king with both his hands,  
 And covered a *yojana* in an hour's time.  
 To the west of the field then he rowed across,  
 And dismounted from the corpse in haste.

"Drona, Shalya, Shakuni, Duhshasana, Bhurishrava,  
 None could equal you, O friend", he exclaimed  
 "None could carry me across this stream of blood,  
 Who be you the noble soul that served me in death"?  
 Turned up the face chief of the Kurus,  
 Peered close and saw Prince Lakshmana, his son.  
 "Alas, my child", shrieked the king, and clasped the body to his bosom,

Sank to the earth he, King Managobinda, moaning aloud.  
 'Flee, my son', I had admonished you,  
 How come, dear, you fell in the perilous field?  
 O my son, my Lakshmana, flower of the world's youth,  
 Your name revered in all three worlds,  
 Excelling, my Lakshmana, in all the thirty-two qualities,  
 Deemed of the wise as all-perfect.  
 Son of mine, resplendent you were as the rising sun;  
 More radiant looked your body than gold.  
 You, my blind-man's staff, my son, you've left me utterly supportless,  
 Sunk is my raft in the depths of the sea."

*Mahabharata*, 15th-16th century

Tr. by Madhusudan Pati

## The Birth of Shri Krishna

ACHYUTANANDA DAS

ACHYUTANANDA DAS (Acyutānanda Dās, 16th century) was born in the small hamlet Tilakana in the neighbourhood of Nemala in Cuttack district. Nemala was the place of his spiritual attainments and continues to be a place of pilgrimage for his devotees and admirers. He lived for about 120 years. For many years he lived in Ranpur enjoying the patronage of the local ruler, where he composed his *Haribansa*. (*Haribansa*), a free rendering of the Sanskrit *Harivamsa*. He is famous as a significant poet, a spiritual preceptor, a master of wisdom emphasizing ethical life, and an

elucidator of the *Pinda-Brahmanda* doctrine and the doctrine of Nirguna. His prophecies known as *Malikas* continue to be cited. Besides *Haribansa*, his other important works are *Sunya Samhita*, *Charikhani* or *Sabdabrahma Samhita*, and *Gurubhakti Gita*. He composed many devotional songs, *Gitas*, *Patalas*, *Puranas*, *Rasas* and lyrical poems.

The following is an extract from *Haribansa*.

"The sky was completely covered with jewel-like clouds  
from end to end.  
Drops of water fell like flowers.  
The long stretch of ground between the prison and  
the house of Nanda,  
Was covered with awnings by Vishwakarma  
No sound was there, not even a whisper.  
The earth was still.  
A soft *malaya* breeze wafted across,  
Nothing was visible in the impenetrable darkness,  
Only flashes of lightning showed the way.  
Debaki, Basudeva and Ugrasena, these three  
And the great sage Gargaba, were awake.  
From the city of Mathura to the town of Gopa  
Viswakarma erected canopies above."

"Listen, Parikshya, jewel among kings,"  
Said sage Shuka:  
"To Shri Bhagabata, the beautiful story of Krishna.  
The stone latches keeping the doors firmly shut  
Suddenly collapsed,  
Doors flew open through the magic of Vishwakarma.  
Lightning flashed showing the way.  
Iron chains and fetters fell down breaking into a thousand pieces,  
Like wax melting at the touch of a flame.  
The heavy load and pain lifted from the soul of Basudeva  
He spoke to Debaki these soothing words:  
"I do not quite comprehend what is happening,  
A miracle has occurred,  
Fetters on my feet fell down,  
A great joy fills my heart,  
I know not why I feel such great joy.  
Fate seems to have become very kind,  
All my sins have vanished,  
It is time for earning merit,

And look, dear woman, how strange  
 That the guards and the watchmen  
 Who used to shout all the time  
 Are fast asleep,  
 And the lights—lamps and torches, all gone.”

Debaki looking straight at the face of Basudeba, said:  
 ‘O husband, this belly with its foetal burden is hanging down:  
 My whole body racked by unbearable pain,  
 The moment of delivery is near,  
 Dear husband, please come closer,  
 See, all the nurses and mid-wives have gone to sleep  
 I am unable to withstand the pain,  
 Please come near, hurry.”

As she spoke her womb turned upside down  
 Her husband strong as a lion was helpless.  
 “Listen. King Parikshya,” said the son of Vyasa:  
 “Debaki’s pregnancy was in the eighth month,  
 She had taken the ritual bath  
 After the last menstruation  
 On the thirteenth day of the dark fortnight of the month of Dhanu,  
 And now it was the eighth day  
     of the dark fortnight of *Bhadra*,  
 Thursday, in the asterism of Rohini  
 Moon in the constellation of Brusha  
 Since sixty dandas,  
*Gara* the Karana and *Shoubhana* the Yoga,  
 Fourteen days after the beginning of the month of Simha,  
 Sri Narayan took birth on completion of eight months,  
 The God came down to the earth  
 From the womb of Debaki  
 Like the moon rising in the sky of virtue,  
 His dark blue face bright as the sun at zenith.

“It was the unbearable season of rains,  
 The night was dark with heavy clouds,  
 Rain fell in huge drops,  
 The world was gripped by the cloudy night,

Only occasional flashes of lightning showed the way.  
 Debaki having given birth to the son fell into sleep  
 The frail woman was relieved of her burden only through her faith.

"All alone, I am left to myself," she was thinking,  
 "O Lord Dharma, hear me witness,  
 Nurses, maids, midwives and attendants,  
 All are asleep, totally unconscious.  
 Goddess Durga, kindly teach me  
 To nurse and protect my son.  
 King Kamsa so powerful and cruel,  
 Even a mere fly crossing his path is cut to pieces,  
 Where can I flee from this terrible danger?  
 If he knows, death for me is certain,  
 Fifty thousand warriors are on watch all around  
 All of them alert at their allotted stations in the house,  
 How can I evade them and escape?  
 It is impossible.  
 Even if I manage to steal my son from this place,  
 Where can I hide him, in which world?  
 Why am I so anxious to stick to my home?"  
 She thought, "Why not leave for another place?  
 Even if I lose my life for his sake,  
 The story of my endeavour shall live for all time."

From *Haribansa*, 16th century

Tr. by Rajendra Prasad Das

## Chhanda Chautisha

BHAUNRI DAS

BHAUNRI DAS (Bhaunri Dās, 16th century) wrote some *chautishas* like *Khiti Chautisha* and *Chhanda Chautisha* (Chhandā Cautiśa). One of his Gitas has been published under the title *Bhaunri Gita*. Another work of his is *Gyana Chudamani*.

○ Hari, you are Krishna, appreciative of inmost thoughts  
 and a friend of devotees.  
 the ocean of kindness and grace unending.  
 All the time I was looking for you,  
 you were hard at work serving me.

○ Hari, you are always busy with creation and destruction  
 with the five elements: sky, wind, light, water and earth.

you pervade the entire universe like butter  
hidden in milk.

- Hari, like a full moon in the dark new-moon night  
you alone shine endlessly.  
Lord, you grant the four great gifts;  
You take away the three worst blemishes;  
one has only to spare a thought for you.
- Hari, you are the three qualities behind the six great bonds;  
Brahma and the six sages are not different  
From the supreme overself and the self.  
Lord, I remained wakeful during sleep  
And rose to find the Name there.
- Hari, there the three rivers flow;  
your abode is on the western one;  
you are the lord Niranjana, the one without stain;  
but assuming other names you abide in all forms.
- Hari, those depending on you get your support;  
they do not falter since you are there to hold them up.  
Lord, you are the master of all.  
Bhaunri has correctly spotted you.
- Hari, always scared of being deluded,  
I was at peace, after I saw you with my eyes;  
the moment I took off the lid  
nectar was spilling over, but I gulped it down.
- Hari, the alphabet that is not an alphabet,  
the non-alphabet is your ultimate secret.  
I located that syllable with the half marker  
the Om at the tri-junction  
And with a start awakened to your Name.
- Hari, this world, a mere retiring place, is really a lie  
even when staying here, it is still worthless.  
Lord, how could you know my distress  
and grace me with insight ?
- Hari, I latched on to the eternal fire  
and awakened effulgence;  
catching hold of my mind, I joined it to the Name.  
Lord, crazy about your devotees,  
you always come to the one telling the Name.

- Hari, the four vital breaths—*prana*, *vyana*, *udana* and *samana*—  
and the five elements constitute life;  
Lord, in vain did I wonder  
until I met the light on crossing the twilight barrier.
- Hari, all that flow speak and sing and the Vedas  
survive due to the Name only.  
Lord, for crossing this ocean, the world,  
Name is the only vessel;  
and your humble *Bhaunri* has found it.
- Hari, Hara killed Brahma in your name;  
Delusion and illusion are your servants;  
in a trice you vanquished Yama, the lord of death;  
And the lord of love,  
already reduced to ashes, desires to continue  
his mischief.
- Hari, the three sacred syllables Ra Ma La  
continue to exist containing your Name  
Lord, I am greedy for the Name.  
But the fire of my anger burns for the evil ones.
- Hari, the incalculable crores of universes  
are only material manifestations of your  
Brahma essence.  
Lord, if you grudge me your service,  
who will ever trust you ?
- Hari, I have given up all rituals, pilgrimages, and charities;  
I have left all *shrutis*, *smritis*, *puranas* and lexicons.  
I have given up all work,  
having taken refuge in the only truth, your Name.
- Hari, Hari, says *Bhaunri*,  
his emotion is like the ocean;  
he sings only to please you.  
Lord, here ends the *chhanda chautisha*  
containing only the nectar of your name.



## Two Poems

DEVADURLLABHA DAS

DEVADURLLABHA DAS (Devadurllabha Dās, 16th century) was the author of *Rahasya Manjari*, the only Kavya to his credit. It is a poem on Sri Krishna in which the supremacy of Sri Radha has been established. Two extracts, *Go to Shri Krishna* and *The Six Seasons*, are given below :

## 1

## Go to Sri Krishna

Feet red and radiant, anklets of gold,  
 Tinkling bells on the wristband,  
 Keeping time with the jingling bangles,  
 O friend, why don't you go ?  
 Why don't you go to Kanhai ?  
 Jewels, necklace, bracelets and clothes :  
 Taking whatever you want,  
 Dark as the rain-cloud, more lustrous than emerald,  
 Face graceful like an open lotus,  
 And curls on the forehead like a string of bumble-bees.  
 O messenger, please hurry.  
 Red lips glisten,  
 The flute pours out sweet melodies,  
 The large pearl on his nose hangs against the lips,  
 Like the bright Nexus in the sky  
 O friend, please go.

The dot of sandalpaste on his forehead  
 Like moon against thick rain-clouds,  
 The ear-pendants swaying against the cheeks rival the sun,  
 O messenger, why not hurry ?

Crowned with a thatch of wavy hair,  
 Covered with flowers of many hues,  
 The peacock feather ravishingly tucked on the left,  
 His head entices the infatuated bumble-bee :  
 O friend, aren't you going?

Help me to dress,  
 I shall meet Kanhai.

Playing softly on the flute, he beckons with his eyes,  
O messenger, please hurry.

Fasten the anklets;  
When I race through the forest  
Hearing the anklet bells, Kanhai would go crazy.  
O friend, please hurry.

Wearing the silk saree with an ornamental border  
I will move out looking for Kanhai,  
Decked in bangles, bracelets and wristlets,  
O messenger, please hurry.

Tie the *vida*<sup>1</sup> thread like braided *kusha* grass  
A little above my *bahuti*<sup>2</sup> armband,  
Adorn my ears with sparkling ear-ornaments inlaid with pearls  
O friend, please hurry.

Put the nose-rings studded with five pearls on the nostrils,  
My *jhuntia* toe-rings ringing out *jhamak-jhamak*  
I shall announce my approach to Kanhai,  
O friend, please hurry.

After voicing these agonies, the young woman swooned;  
Her companions rushed to her aid crying,  
Supporting and lifting, they continued fanning her,  
O messenger, won't you go even now ?

"Gobinda", "Gobinda" beat the drums,  
The sound reverberating against the sky.  
O Lord, says Deba  
Let me never be separated from Gobinda.

From *Rahasya Manjari*, 16th century

Tr. by Rajendra Prasad Das

2

The Six Seasons

Now the terrible summer season,  
The end of the month of Vaisakha,

1. Ornament for the upper arm.
2. Armlet.

Heat-gales sweep, firestorms rage,  
 Mango and jackfruit ripen, waters boil,  
 I burn my body in torment,  
 Oh I die, die, die,  
 He left me; what was my fault !

The inner room too hot to sleep,  
 I came to the open room on the south  
 To be with my Lord  
 We smeared one another with water  
 Cooled with camphor and sandal paste  
 He ate cucumber, soft kernel of the tender palmfruit,  
 Green coconuts, candy placed with black pepper,  
 The thorn-apple growing in water and betel;  
 He made me eat all these after he finished his meal,  
 Contented I slept in his arms.

After *Rishabha*, the month of *Asharha* came to an end,  
*Shrabana* followed, the rainy season was upon us;  
 Dark clouds covered the sky to fall down as rain.  
 Days were ominously dark as night,  
 Thunders crashed without respite,  
 Lightning rent the sky,  
 My heart sank, how do I sleep without my beloved on my lap !

The lotus plant smiles, the earth is happy,  
 Water-hens call and frogs respond,  
 Rivers and streams swell and overflow,  
 As do the good women, all decked up expecting  
 Their husbands returning home from other places,

Remembering the excellence of their women  
 The men give up all their routine and come home,  
 Only my beloved is not yet back.  
 I know he has no love for me now.  
 At the end of *Bhadra* comes *Ashvina*  
 With autumn here, the sun brightens,  
 Dews descend from the sky, smoke enters the earth,  
 Rid of water, clouds sport in many hues,  
 Cold from the north closes around the lonely women,  
 Keeping off those fortunate to be with their lovers.

The white waterlily and screwpine bloom  
Moonbeams brighten and rutting elephants look for their mates,

With the end of *Kartika* enters *Margashirsha*;  
*Hemanta* season brings on the heavy dews,  
Lotus dies, the north-wind blows,  
Sea becomes calm, breakers advance slowly,  
The rain-ravaged marks of fragrant leaves smile again,  
The jasmine responds with white flowers,  
If it could, it would sing the *gundakeri* tune,  
The swollen waters of rivers fall back,  
Roads reopen,  
But at the end of the day, still wait for my man.  
O friend, I have prepared special condiments;  
The juicy seed of the water-apple cooked in clarified butter,  
Lacing it with camphor, saffron and black pepper,  
Seasoned in sweetened milk,  
The betel-container full,  
Awaiting the arrival of my beloved in our bed.  
After *Pusha* comes the celebrated *Makara*  
The sacred season, winter, comes.  
People undertake the *Makara*-penances to earn merit,  
Fogs blanket the earth,  
The myrtle blooms and the waterlily withers,  
The *bauhinia* buds pointed like the love-god's arrows emerge,  
The northwind prepares to depart,  
Breakers rise again covering the sea,  
Like the endless heads of Serpent-god Ananta.  
One day when I saw a cuckoo, I wondered,  
O friend, when do I see my beloved again !  
The intoxicatingly fragrant *kuruveli* flower in panicles,  
The cuckoo's heart gladdened, seeing the mango bloom,  
After *Makara* and the end of *Phalguna*  
Came spring with the god of love,  
The sweet-scented *malaya* breeze wafted across the land  
The trees and creepers erupted with new leaves,  
Flowers opened,  
Crowds surged at the spring festivals,  
But the god of love incarnating as the cowherd,  
Madana-gopala took away all my joy.

As I recount this tale of my misery  
 The mango-tree comes out with young fruit;  
 The cuckoo makes merry among branches,  
 Pining for Krishna, the intoxicating one,  
 Radha enters the forest of Brindaban,  
 To find and attach herself to her Krishna  
 Is her only wish.  
 She sees the trees laden with flowers and fruits,  
 But, says Deva, Radha really moves linking arms  
 With her beloved.

From *Rahasya Manjari*, 16th century

Tr. by Rajendra Prasad Das

## The Tale of Ta-Poi

GOPINATH DASA

GOPINATH DASA (Gopinānth Dāsa, 16th century) was a celebrated poet. His works include *Budhei Osha*, *Khudurukuni* or *Ta-Poi*, *Govind-vilas*, and *Gurutattva Sara*. His popularity springs from his meticulous handling of the folk narrative with simplicity and lyrical mellifluousness.

The following is an excerpt from his long narrative poem *The Tale of Ta-Poi* (Tā-Poi). On its literal level the poem celebrates the richness of Orissa in ancient times when its businessmen and merchants used to visit Java, Borneo and Sumatra by sea route to sell their merchandise. The poem unveils the interesting story of a girl whose longing for a golden moon caused her lose her father and mother. In spite of such losses, the girl Ta-Poi's brothers loved her dearly so much so that at the time of their departure for trading they advised their wives to take proper care of their dear sister.

Sakrabati narrates, thus, to her companions  
 the festival's practices, rituals and conventions  
 And Rohini, her mother-in-law, requests all  
 to listen carefully, with mind tranquil.  
 In the beginning was there Jambu island  
 the salty sea hooking its hand.

There did Ceylon, an island, stand,  
 The sea splashing with its watery band.  
 In the island of Rasa, by the salt sea,  
 softly floats there the milky sea.

Pretty is its look, glamorous and elegant,  
fenced by the salt sea, wild and turbulent.  
There seeps *Sindhu* rich with opulence  
away from the mountains, an exiled existence.

Tiladhwaja, the king, rules merrily there,  
expanding his kingdom so fair and rare.  
With his knowledge expansive and wisdom deep,  
Piously he rules, as does he his subjects keep.

Blessed with sons, his queens fair,  
servants are there to take care.  
No lies or untruth governing his court,  
no enemy treads here to bring discomfort.

Rearing his subjects like his own sons  
hardly does he delay in taking decisions.  
The name of his Minister is Gunanidhi  
whose witty, wise son is Subuddhi.

Charming is his city and beautiful,  
like Indra's palace, warm and colourful.  
Many a merchant inhabit this place,  
with rapture and richness they grace.

The god of wealth shies away from them,  
for they hide in their houses stores of gems.  
Maidservants wear the robes of a queen,  
golden bangles on their hands—a rare scene !

Wives of merchants are beautiful, true;  
Their bodies covered with golden hue.  
They keep their bodies free and light  
without the burden of ornaments and their weight.

In their houses, tools shine and glitter,  
steps on them do really matter.  
On the roof-top is placed a golden pitcher;  
the breeze there makes a banner flutter.

Tanaybant's house stands there;  
his wife Shakuntala, humble and fair.  
They are blessed with sons seven  
and a daughter, Ta-Poi, with beauty from heaven.

Seven huge boats does he possess  
sons seven and their wives bring luck and riches.  
Happily they live, without any fear  
worries of no kind do their hearts tear.

With Minister's daughter and companions many  
Once Ta-Poi begins her games so funny.  
The game of cooking they begin  
with sand and dust sorting out their plan.

Instantly a widow Brahmin comes to them  
and teases Ta-Poi causing her shame :  
"You're the loveliest child of your sire;  
you're the kindred sister of your brothers rare.

Shame to you, shame to you :  
a bamboo-basket and winnower on your knee.  
If I were you, I would have a winnower golden;  
I would get a moon out of gold molten.

With the status and riches you now own  
You can get all with a stroke of your frown.  
See, how your bosom friend is busy  
with a golden basket so easy.

Out of bamboos your toys are made  
and within no time they will fade".  
Belching out these words of venom  
she goes her ways, making Ta-Poi glum.

With the darkness descending lower and lower  
All leave for their abodes dear.  
Wearing a sad and heavy face Ta-Poi leaves;  
shutting up herself in her room she sleeps.

All members throng at the dining table,  
the daughter's absence does her father unsettle.  
"Where's my daughter ?" cries out the father,  
The daughter-in-law makes it clear:

"Ta-Poi is asleep closing her door".  
Opening the door goes the father poor:  
"Why are you aggrieved, O my child !  
if you've broken anything, I shall build.

If you have lost, I will find;  
 don't be stubborn and don't you mind.  
 Did the washerman refuse cleaning?  
 Did the betel-seller refuse giving?

Did the maid refuse combing  
 your braid beautiful and curling?  
 Shall I now arrange your wedding?  
 Why aren't you frank, yourself in expressing?"

Pressing her sob-soaked face against the pillow  
 Ta-Poi sheds tears without looking up or below.  
 Brothers seven fail, and fails the mother  
 to persuade her to come to dinner.

All are restless, all are worried,  
 how to tame her and keep her anguish buried.  
 At the youngest daughter-in-law Nilendri's request  
 Ta-Poi decides to speak out, comforting the rest.

"A golden moon is my only demand  
 without which I wouldn't obey anyone's command".  
 Listening to the demand of the dear child,  
 they say: "But, for this you're so wild?"

By tomorrow let the work begin  
 in a fortnight you get the moon golden".  
 Ta-Poi being happy and consoled  
 on her mother's lap she cajoles.

This is how the sad night passes;  
 the expert goldsmith and his wife are asked.  
 The work begins on the golden moon  
 with starry fays around, to be completed soon.

In the half-moon, dies the father  
 and alas! in the full moon, the mother.  
 What misfortune befalls the family  
 that was passing its time so merrily.

Soon the rituals come to an end,  
 with the help of Brahmins and many a friend.  
 Slowly do they spend all their riches,  
 the brothers decide to go for business



Thus all the brothers plan to row  
and inform their wives so.  
Sadly do they scan their plight  
parentless they are, without delight.

"We are taking our boats afar,  
all of you take our sister's care.  
Let her not feel our parents' absence;  
make her live sans any pretence.

Give her a cosy bath in the morn  
with costly attire her body adorn.  
Then serve her with watered rice  
and all that's delicious to her choice.

Combing her hair softly, robe her dearly  
and taking her to the swing, rock her gently.  
Thus you all must take care  
of our sweet moon-faced sister."

All sisters-in-law avowed heartily  
to keep Ta-Poi clear merrily.  
"Don't worry about her at all;  
we would keep her well, let anything befall."

Then comes a long demand list  
to drive out the woe's wistful mist.  
One requests a nose-string,  
the other a gold ring.

Someone orders a bracelet  
and someone the enviable armlet.  
Someone requests a necklace  
gleaming with starry grace.

Someone demands the budded jasmine of gold  
and someone the saris' glittering mould.  
At last Ta-Poi requests her brothers  
to get for her nothing but dolls.

Listening carefully to the list  
the brothers seven could know the gist.

"O Lord, you manifest in all objects  
we're merely your trivial subjects".

Uttering these words the brothers seven  
merrily moved to the busy haven.

From *Khudurukuni Osha* or *Ta-Poi*, 16th century

Tr. by Niranjan Mohanty

## Six Poems

JASHOBANTA DAS

JASHOBANTA DAS (Jaśobanta Dās, 16th century) was born near Jagatsingpur in the undivided Cuttack district. He was a special disciple of Shri Chaitanya and was known for his miraculous powers. His popular poem was *Gobinda Chandra*, about a prince who renounced worldly life to become a sanyasi. He wrote a number of religious and mystical poems, including many small poems and *bhajans*, where he is considered on a par with Achyutananda (16th century) and Bhima Bhoi (19th century).

### 1

## The Cow Roams

The cow roams.  
Always eats the crops;  
If the cowherd can go after it  
It can't eat so.  
The cow's glories are many  
With what should I compare them?  
Her shed is empty,  
And yet she has five calves  
They follow her always,  
And she always gives milk;  
No end, no limit.  
You churn that milk,  
Get butter,  
Keep that butter in fire,  
And you get ghee,  
Drink it  
And you have the real ecstasy.

Says Jasobanta,  
 You have such a cow at home.  
 What are you afraid of,  
 There is no alternative to the cow,  
 Submit at her feet.

*Gai Bhuta Bhutai Lo*, 16th century

Tr. by J.M. Mohanty

2

No Fixed Emptiness

He hasn't any fixed emptiness,  
 He shines Nameless,  
 He hasn't any leg or hand,  
 He exists undefined,  
 He has no body,  
 He lives in bodilessness,  
 He is not worshipped,  
 He never does any work,  
 He has no habit,  
 He is invisible,  
 He is not to be shifted,  
 He is fixed,  
 He is shapeless  
 All around,  
 He is not a being  
 He is Unbeing,  
 He stays in the Absolute  
 That which is *Brahma*,  
 Over the universe,  
 It is barren,  
 Yet it gave birth  
 To the Absolute Son,  
 Give your attention  
 Not to portions,  
 But to oneness,  
 There is no intelligence,  
 No thought, no consciousness,  
 It is not in the eyes,  
 You can't see it,  
 the Yogis, even through the eight Yogas,  
 Could not meet it;

It's not in the Absolute  
 Over the complete pleasure,  
 And all the five Veenas gather there.  
 The wind does not pass  
 The sun and the moon don't move,  
 The teacher and the student  
 And all the rituals :  
 How can they be there ?  
 It is beyond all worships,  
 All penances, all Yajnas,  
 All places of pilgrimages,  
 Even Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva,  
 Do not know anything about it,  
 It is not spoken,  
 It is unspoken, immeasurable,  
 Thus, explained Lord Jagannath  
 To Jasobanta.

*Thula Shunnya Nahin Jara*, 16th century

Tr. by J.M. Mohanty

3

O Messenger, Let's Go to See the Swan

O woman-messenger,  
 Let's to to see the Swan,  
 It has hidden the bird inside its beak.  
 The strange swan has three feet,  
 One foot has pervaded the deep,  
 One foot is on the head,  
 One foot is hidden in the speck, O lady !  
 The male swan has one egg  
 The single egg has covered the unfathomable, O lady !

The egg broke  
 And the little bird flew away,  
 And the temple submerged  
 In a handful of water, O lady !

I long for that Swan's feet  
 says Jashobant,  
 And he speaks with a meaning, O dear !

*Duli go jiba hamsaku dekhi*, 16th century

Tr. by J.M. Mohanty

## 4

## The Intoxicated Milch-Cow

The milch-cow is intoxicated, drunken,  
 It has broken the tether and run loose;  
 Who can sing of its glories ?  
 What can be compared to it ?  
 There is no one to describe it  
 In the twenty-one worlds.  
 The cow's name is Good Thought,  
 Who is opposed to it ?  
 Who knows the incantations ?  
 The vast land lies fallow,  
 The cow never ate grass even for a day.  
 I tied the knot of three virtues;  
 It broke, and ran away.

Says Jashobanta :  
 I long for the cow's feet.  
 Tell me,  
 Who can cure my cow ?

*Duli Go Jiba Hansaku Dekhi*, 16th century

Tr. by J.M. Mohanty

## 5

## A Deceitful Person

A very deceitful person :  
 He is nobody's  
 He does not take the name of  
 Rama, Krishna or Shrihari  
 Even for a day.  
 When you were formed in the mother's womb,  
 It was undefined land, no shape;  
 In the first month  
 You looked white,  
 In the second month  
 You were like fish in water,  
 In the third month  
 You sprouted branches in emptiness,  
 In the fourth

The bones were arranged,  
 In the fifth  
 The lotus of a navel was formed,  
 In the sixth  
 Seventy-two arteries and veins  
 Were put in their places,  
 In the seventh month  
 Nose and tongue  
 Mouth and ear  
 And eyes and eyebrows  
 Shaped like the love-god's instruments,  
 And the rivers,  
 Ganga and Yamuna,  
 Ever flowing,  
 All formed, one after another.  
 In the eighth month  
 The fingers, hands, feet,  
 In the ninth  
 The skin was used as a cover,  
 In the tenth  
 It all ended  
 In great happiness,  
 And how you praised  
 O Nanda's son,  
 If I live in this world,  
 I know  
 I would be singing your name  
 All the time.  
 The carpenter who made you  
 He stayed in you, remember,  
 He kept the ten entries,  
 Attached ten doors,  
 And Nanda's son  
 Stayed at *Sushumna*,  
 The innermost door,  
 If you want to reach him  
 Cut through illusions,  
 Worship your Guru  
 And meditate on Shrihari.  
 You were born  
 And fell into this world,  
 The moment you cried  
 Everything was forgotten,  
 While in the lying-in room

You never thought of Hari,  
 Five years  
 You spent as a child,  
 In ten years  
 You played with houses of dust,  
 And in twelve years  
 You were happy to wear clothes,  
 Even then you never uttered  
 The name of Shrihari.  
 You were restless  
 At the age of fifteen,  
 At twenty  
 You thought of women,  
 You stayed with them  
 And days passed  
 And passed your youth,  
 Even then, even for a day  
 You never thought of Shrihari,  
 How are you going  
 To cross this world?  
 Now you are old  
 You are sure to see  
 The land of death,

Says Jashobanta :  
 Serve your Guru,  
 Meditate on his name,  
 You will be redeemed,  
 Your heart will be cleansed  
 Of all the sins of the past birth,  
 And you will ascend to paradise,  
 To glory and brightness.

*Bada Mayabi jiba*, 16th century

Tr. by J.M. Mohanty,

6

At the End of the Day

At the end of the day, early in the evening,  
 Be at the audience hall of the Jagannath temple and see,  
 The face glowing like a black cloud and lips shining red,  
 And be absolved of all sins.  
 Light the lamp,

Lift the torch that lights up the world,  
 The smell of camphor and incense pervades the air,  
 The graceful face dims the moonbeams.  
 All the immortal gods with Indra, their king,  
 Brahma the creator, the Sun, the Moon, the Wind,  
 The lords of all directions  
 And all others of Heaven,  
 Crowd the audience hall with fly-wheel in hand.  
 At the hours of the evening-offerings, all jostle,  
 Shouts of 'Hari, Hari' drown the roar of the sea.  
 And His two eyes !  
 Are those a pair of white lotuses on the surface  
 Of the dark *Kalindi* waters ?  
 Or a pair of crazy bumble-bees kissing the dreamy lotus ?  
 Or a pair of dark *chakora* birds drinking moonbeams  
 Flowers adorn the knot of hair on the head,  
 A diamond pendant hangs over the forehead,  
 Like the bright morning star against dark clouds,  
 The gods, the demons and the men  
 All come to this evening adoration.

Says Jashobanta Das,  
 He does not see yet, feels he had seen,  
 And having seen he has become one with them.  
 At this prayer, the evening prayer,  
 The best of the three daily prayers,  
 Who can describe the *lila* of Jagannatha,  
 The *lila* that remains unknown even to the likes of  
 Brahma and Shiva !

*Dibasa Seshakale*, 16th century

Tr. by Rajendra Prasad Das

## O the One with Round Eyes!

MADHABI DASİ

MADHABI DASİ (Mādhabi Dāsī, 16th century) is known as a disciple of Shri Chaitanya. She was the sister of Sikhi Mchanty, another famous disciple of Shri Chaitanya. She is known as a *Vaishnav-Padabali* writer in Brajaboli. Only one of her Oriya poems has been collected till now.

O the round-eyed one, Shrihari, the life of the Universe,  
 Please hear this ardent prayer of one in agony:



Who haven't you saved and from how many dangers !  
 Oh, merciful wielder of the *Saranga* bow !  
 If I set out to describe all those, it would fill a volume.  
 What can this humble sinning woman narrate ?

Harlots, Jivanti and Pingala,  
 escaped from the miseries of the world,  
 Keeping the flag of your infinite mercy flying.

I, a wretch unfit to be your servant,  
 beg of you to be kind,  
 Please hear this prayer of Madhavi.

From *Shakanyana He*, 16th century

Tr. by Rajendra Prasad Das

## Parimala

### Narasingha Sena

NARASINGHA SENA (Narasiṅha Sena, 16th century) was the illustrious son of Tapan Sena. His works include *Parimala* (Parimalā), a long epic poem in 25 cantos, and *Dhaga Mukhabali*. Although love remains the haunting theme of Sena, his poetry encompasses a rare richness in style. His poetry gleams with sparkling metaphors and similes. Sena takes his readers to luminous heights with the help of his imagination. What is striking in Sena is his original narrative technique. In his imaginative leap into the heart of existence, Sena merges the border of past, present and future, so that all time becomes eternally present. In *Parimala*, Sena portrays the love affair between the cursed but beautiful Parimala and Prince Makaraketu. The poem not only celebrates the purity of bondage that lies between the lovers, but also harps on the harmony between the human world and the natural world.

In the excerpt given below Makaraketu recollects the sweetness of Parimala when the rainy season arrives, and he is far away from his lady-love.

O youthful, blue and romantic hearts,  
 listen to how the rains set in with mirth !

The sky entire is cloud-clad,  
 no space is left, and all are glad.

The lofty sky echoes the repeated sound  
 of the outrageous thunderbolt's wakeful hound.

Where can you hide amid such uproar;  
the sky looks heavy and burdensome more ?  
Merrily wanders the pitch-dark night  
avenging the day's pitiable plight.

Once and again the lightning in the sky  
vanishes within the twinkle of an eye.

Hiding the stout and massive mountains within  
it excites springs of water on the earth's skin.

The one that swallows up the rocky ranges  
how can it spare the unsaintly visages ?

As though, out of the dark a devilish time  
Came unkindly to a desolate lady's clime.

Day in and day out it rains;  
The coy cloud sticks to the mountains.

The sweet-scented *ketaki* blooms around;  
Wild jasmines creep on the tree and ground.

The buds of *malati* gracefully do open;  
the *girishyama* flowers flowers are lovingly strewn.

Banana skin gleams green;  
with whiteness the willow-flowers glisten.

Leaving aside all fake penitence,  
the rivers wild swell up in opulence.

The swans begin to abandon the earth  
towards Manasarobar they flee with mirth.

Strongly and acutely blows the wind,  
*Malati* spreading its fragrance kind.

Blossoms new and rare begin to bloom,  
thwarting the bank's pervading gloom,

The sun in haste shies away soon,  
Covering its body with darkness at noon.

Clouds thick, new and youthful,  
hover over the sky, shy and playful.  
The wild peacock gets more wild with the peahen,  
getting the touch of an immaculate heaven.

Spreading out their trunks to the blue  
Merrily they dance with multiple hue.

Beholding the lustful arrival of this season  
the lady forlorn, for her living finds no reason.

Someone loses faith in her living;  
someone is busy listening

To the echoes of thunder-bolt;  
for all other meaning of life is lost.

Someone braves to watch the rain,  
someone bewails the lover's absence in vain.

Someone intends to lose her life  
someone tries to overcome this strife.

Wild grows her heart, and her mind  
patiently awaits the moments kind.

How long would she bear this separation,  
for life shall leak out in sheer frustration ?

Someone who seems to be outwardly kind  
inwardly would burn the layers of her mind.

One who enjoys the company of her lover,  
happily does she climb on the fiery altar.

At the sight of rains ceaseless and thunder  
her mind trembles and body is astir for the plunderer.

She drinks wild the passion's wine  
driving away the chill from her body's vine !

A lover who stays away in such a season  
is bound to hurry homeward plucking his own reason.

While hurrying homeward in the rain  
he delights in remembering his lady's face again.  
At the repeated sounds of the fierce thunder,  
instead of Jaimuni<sup>1</sup>, his lady's name did he utter.

Inebriate of passion intense and intimate  
in the shrine of the invisible love-god he does meditate.

Someone enters into his lady's room  
and receives warmth from her face's bloom.

At this hour of rain in his honeyed palace  
Makaraketu loses the charm and colour of his face.

This unkind season knows not my plight;  
My dear lady is no more in my sight.

Tears trickle down from my twin eyes  
like the cloud covering the entire skies.

Perhaps, dejected look these directions,  
like my heart's tuneless trepidations.

My dear lady is now out of sight  
like the sun's cumbersome plight.

Like a discontented swan my being  
waits to migrate to some other spring.

If my moon-faced lady were here  
at this hour of ceaseless rain and thunder,

What a strange ecstasy I would have reaped !  
What blissful moment I would have heaped !

At the echoing patter of rain and thunder  
she would have surely come to surrender.

Watching the sky cloudy and dark  
she would have left kisses stark.

1. Jaimuni was believed to be a very powerful sage. When one utters his name thunderbolts shy away.

Like the lightning sparkling in the clouds dark  
her face glistening within my heart.

Once, I recollect, failing to bear thunder's uproar,  
shunning her shame, she came closer,

and held me on her lap so dear,  
begged me to kiss her on the ear.

Once, listening to the peacock's song,  
she shut her ears with fingers long.

On her golden body the pores went wild  
lotus and *kanak* flowers stood matchless and mild.

Painfully did she shut her lotus-like eyes,  
dreaming only of the absent love-god's sighs.

Without taking away my breath, O rains !  
you burden me with woes and infinite pains.

No, no, you shouldn't kill me thus  
my lady would be waiting far away with blush.

I dream of meeting her once again;  
let there be life within me till then.

My bright-eyed lady must be aware of this rain,  
surely she knows; I am alive for her not in vain.

If she is kind, she won't forget my mind,  
nor would she ignore the games of love I left behind.

She must be realizing my pitiful plight  
and hence would she endure all pangs, making herself bright.

From *Parimala*, 16th century

Tr. by Niranjan Mohanty

## The Kidnapper of the Child

NARAYANA DAS

NARAYANNANDA ABADHUT SWAMI OR NARAYANA DAS (16th century) is the author of *Rudra Sudhanidhi*. He was the first writer of Gadya Kavya in Oriya. The work in its style was influenced by the famous Sanskrit Gadya Kavya *Kadambari* of

Vana. The Kavya, though a *Kalpanika Kavya*, gives a clear picture of Shaivism, Shakta worship, and Vaishnavism in Orissa. It gives more importance to Vishnu than to other sects like the Shaiva, Shakta, Bauddha, Jaina, etc. The writer was well-versed in Sanskrit and so he uses more "Tatsama" words.

One episode from *Rudra Sudhanidhi* is given below.

Shutak Harini came to take away the child. She changed her physical features into a formidable shape.

She assumed a dark formidable figure. Her two eyes looked blood-red. The scarlet tongue of hers came out and withdrew like lightning. Her teeth looked like the crescent moon. Deep, dark and thick were her eye-brows. Her breasts dangled down to the knee. She was in a black robe. She decorated her hair with ordinary flowers. Her thin thighs were like the legs of a heron. Her waist had the shape of a *mridang* (drum). With black-berry-coloured lips she twisted her eye-brows like a black serpent. Like deep-set graves were her round eyes. The hairs on her body had the colour of molten gold. Deep was the belly. Her voice vibrated like the sound produced by broken long trumpets. In this guise she came to kidnap the child (Kumara). She bent down to have a look at her features. She was death incarnate who came to take away the soul.

In the nick of time at the sight of the female monster the child (Kumara) mused thus :

"I have come across many yoginis by Parbati in Kailash. This one has come to kidnap me." He chanted the name of Parbati and remained firm like a hillock. The monster tried to lift him. Kumara would not move an inch. She gathered strength, tried again and again in her endeavour to lift the child. But in vain. Then she fancied the idea to throttle the child. At such vain efforts of the *Shutak Harini*, the child had a tremendous laugh. The ferocious yogini became awed at him in surprise. She betrayed a deep sigh and thought of the strange incident. "I have stolen children of Gods, human beings, Gandharbs, Yakshas, Rakshasas and Kinnars. I have not seen such a child as this. A child immediately after birth does not laugh so loudly. Gods have forbidden me that I cannot steal away the devotees of Lord Basudeva. It is an authentic guess because I who could lift mountains failed to lift this child with all my force. Let me discuss it with him. I shall ask him about the mystery."

Before the monster asked him, the child spoke to her: "O Yogini, why are you so keen on stealing me away? With this ugly body of flesh and blood of yours, you hasten towards ruinous consequences. You deviate from the path of the noble realisation of life. You are too ignorant to envision the ultimate place of life. Your monstrous physique and your vile nature succumb to a disastrous end of life. The great fool that you are, you rejoice in your malicious deeds instead. You are active after the negative aspects of human nature. You trap queens; you indulge in violence. Tell me, what sort of pleasure do

you derive from it? You are blind to the bright side of life. You are possessed by death and decay. Yet you fall a prey to unholy activities. No other creature in the world is so wretched and miserable as you are. You won't get real happiness in life. Your youthful vigour will wither away unnoticed like the wild malati flower. You will be redeemed from the heinous sin, if goodness and wisdom prevail on you. You will be blessed as an attendant of Parvati in Kailash. An ill-natured giantess, you are called Hidimbi. I pity you. Quit the path of malice."

The child's sayings exerted a great influence on the monstress. It lifted the veil of ignorance and unholy thoughts from her mind. She bathed in divine wisdom. She spoke to him: "O Kumara, today is a sanctified day for me as I am fortunate enough to hear your wise advice. You are god-incarnate. Can you please laugh again as before? Please remove the darkness of ignorance from me. Teach me about the development and glorification of the soul. Do away with my bad nature. Saturate me with the nectar of wisdom. You possess a lotus body. Eliminate the illusion from my eye. Make me your attendant. Can I consider myself blessed by you? I expect things contrary to my status as a giantess. I offer myself as your disciple. Oh, Kala Chakra (Almighty) will make my erotic excitement die away. It offers divine pleasure and emancipates one from the elements of water, fire, wind, cold etc."

As *Shutak Harini* appealed thus to Kumara in purity of heart, he became pleased with her. He wore a smile on his lips and told her: "You are the blessed one. It is a wonder that such wisdom has dawned on you". She replied: "I listen attentively to the wise deliberations of great Rishis and Gods. Gods like Indra beseech Brahma to impart noble teachings. I have heard them keenly; I do not imbibe the wisdom, because I do not avail of the teachings of a real Guru (Sada Guru). You take pity on me and release me from the prison of gross worldly mischief." Kumara said that the wishes of creatures come to effect by their good deeds. Nothing can be done all of a sudden. A hungry man does not eat with both hands. It will take time to realise your wish. It is your first assignment to bring me up as my governess. I shall impart you wise counsels in my youth. You sing in praise of Lord Basudev or Shri Krishna. It is my first advice. It is the mother of knowledge. It is also the king of knowledge. Other knowledge stems from this as things were produced in the ocean of milk."

*Shutak Harini* stayed there as his governess. She gave up the appearance of the formidable monster and assumed a comely appearance. Her knotted brown hair turned into a cascade of the black waves of River Kalindi. Her dark body took the colour of the golden *kataka* flower. Her ugly face became attractive like the beautiful autumn moon. She attracted attention. Her black snake-like eyebrow instantly turned into the shape of a bow. She became

green, lotus-eyed and her nose took the shape of the beautiful *til* flower. She had repulsive black lips like blackberry. Now they looked red like *badhuli* flower. Her crescent teeth and jaws looked white like the jasmine flower. Her dangling red tongue turned into the colour of pink lily. Her ears became round and attractive. Her raucous voice, which produced sounds as if from a broken long trumpet, became melodious like that of the cuckoo in the spring season. Instead of ordinary flowers she bedecked her hair with scented flowers. Her breasts that dangled down to the knee became like the trunk of an infant elephant. Her heron-feet (flat feet) and legs looked like up-turned banana plant. Her gait became alluring like that of a goose. In place of black sari she put on a dazzling white one.

From *Rudra Sudhanidhi*, 16th century

Tr. by Lakshmana Nayak

## Seven Poems

RAGHU ARAKHITA

RAGHU ARAKHITA (16th century) was a poet of Vaishnav *padabalis* based on the story of Shri Krishna. He is also known as the writer of *Gochar Gita*, *Abakash Bhajana* and *Shakuntala Chautisha*. Some of his *padabalis* and a portion of *Shakuntala Chautisha* are given below.

### 1

#### The Spring is Here

The spring moves across the land;  
Mango-trees blossom; trees shed their leaves.  
The Lord of billion universes comes on the swing pavilion.  
Let us proceed, friends, to Brindaban grove  
With mango-blossoms in hand,  
Witness Krishna playing on the swing.

Camphor powder flies.  
The singing myna asks the cuckoo:  
Why do you waste your time sitting in the forest,  
Let us both go, friend, now that the spring is here.  
The Lord of the Yadus, facing south,  
His locks decked with *jai*, *malli*, *malati* and chrysanthemums,  
Has appeared in the swing-pavilion.



O friend, when Jagannath played on the swing  
 Everyone in the city of Lanka honoured him,  
 Raghu Arakhita dedicates this  
 At the lotus feet of Sri Jagannatha.

*Basanta Bahila*, 16th century

Tr. by Rajendra Prasad Das

2

Yashoda Tells Krishna

Yashoda tells Krishna:  
 "You are the soul of my being,  
 Tell me, Krishna, when everyone knows I gave you birth,  
 Who are those daughters of wretches  
 To call you the son of my cousin ?

Of course, you were born when I was sleeping,  
 But, the umbilical cord was still attached to your navel,  
 These daughters of wretches know absolutely nothing."

"O mother, why worry about them,  
 You of course know the truth.  
 Should you so desire, we will summon a mediator,  
 Raghu Arakhita is here to depose."

*Jashoda Krishnanku Kahanti*, 16th century

Tr. by Rajendra Prasad Das

3

Yashoda Asks, O Radha !

Yashoda says : "O Rai,  
 Let us go for a bath to Yamuna."  
 Radhika agrees and walks behind.

"Who gave these white conchshell bangles for your arms ?"  
 asks Yashoda.

"Don't you know, my sister-in-law,  
 The killer of the Conch-demon is my groom,  
 Bringing these new shell-bangles is no problem for him,"  
 answers Radhika.

'O, you You cowherd-maid,  
 Crazy about that enemy of the Conch-demon,  
 I do not know if you speak the truth  
 Or indulge in dream-talk;  
 but you do not like my brother."  
 Says Yashoda.  
 Replies Radhika :  
 "The enemy of the Conch-demon came this night,  
 And put these bangles on both my arms."

O Lord, the holder of the Dise,  
 You are the enemy of the Conch-demon,  
 Protect the poor Raghu Arakshita.

*Jashoda Bolanti A Rai*, 16th century

*Tr. by Rajendra Prasad Das*

4

O Gobinda, Awake

"Awake, O Govinda" calls out Jashomati;  
 "The crow and the cuckoo call, the night breaks into dawn.  
 Your friends, the sons of Braja, are here,  
 You are to take the cattle to pasture.  
 I have butter-oil, butter and cream for you,  
 Get up, my child, get up.  
 Wash your lotus face with scented water.

I will clothe you in silk, and braid you hair,  
 Put the string of beads and my *robala* around the neck,  
 And bangles on your wrists."  
 This, Raghu Arakhita dedicates at the lotus feet of Krishna.

*Nidraru Utha Gobinda*, 16th century

*Tr. by Rajendra Prasad Das*

5

Under the Kadamba Tree

"I was lying down under the *kadamba* tree  
 with the flute under my head,  
 The milkmaids came for water,  
 and stole the flute.

O Radha, take my bangles or necklace of jewels,  
but return the flute.  
Brahma presented that unique flute,  
its music nectar-sweet;  
Since its loss, nothing makes me happy.

I have given up food, milk and water.  
I had a golden holder made for the flute  
And how can I report its loss to mother now ?

I was watching you putting on  
the silk saree, the colour of clouds,  
You brought the back-end of the cloth  
from the rear, spreading it out in front  
and under its cover stole my flute."

Radhika, glancing at her maid, replied :  
"We do not know any flute, do we !"  
Humble Raghu sings of the gallant of Braja

*Kadambara Tale*, 16th century

*Tr.* by Rajendra Prasad Das

6

Everybody Had Everythings

Everybody has everything; only I have none;  
Jagannath alone is my lord.  
With your name on my tongue, I have eaten poison,  
But the poison turned into nectar, my Lord.  
I lie on the sand looking at the *Neelachakra*  
the blue wheel emblem atop the Jagannath temple.  
My life slowly ebbs,  
The flesh of my body will rot on these sands I know,  
Kindly shield me with your disc, O Lord.  
Lord, let my days pass in the pleasant company of the noble ones,  
and let my mind only think of your feet,  
With the leaves of basil used by you gracing my head,  
A morsel of the dried *Nirmalya* grains  
of your food-offering in the mouth,  
Let me, O Lord,  
breathe my last with your name on my lips.

Let me live out the rest of my days, O Lord,  
partaking of your simple fair—coarse grained rice  
and vegetable curry, *badi-mahura*.

And let me stand at the entrance to your sanctum  
the *kalalhata* doorway,  
Serving you with the *alata*<sup>1</sup> fan.  
This is my prayer, listen, O Lord Krishna,  
the beloved of the goddess Rukmini,  
Raghu, the destitute, sings this with ardent devotion,  
Kindly deliver him from this misery, O Lord !

*Saburi Sabu Achi*, 16th century

Tr. by Rajendra Prasad Das

7

Song of Shakuntala

Listen, all good men, I narrate this romance,  
King Dushyanta chasing a doe,  
chanced upon the garden at the hermitage of Kanva.

Curious, the king halted his vehicle,  
It was cool under thick foliage,  
Droves of myna and parakeet were playfully looking for food,  
So were flocks of deer and antelopes,  
nibbling at the foliage when hungry.  
It was thick with trees heavy with luscious fruits;  
branches laden with flower touched the earth.  
The bumble-bees noisily gathering around them,  
filled the air with their hummings.  
The pond, having steps of crystal,  
was lovely with rows of hibiscus on the bank,  
Bowers of *madhavi* and *malati* creepers appeared like houses.  
The peacocks and swans called out again and again.  
Lotus blooming on the surface of clear water  
had bumble-bees madly sucking in the honey.  
Bathed in pollen, having drunk too much,  
The bees were unable to fly.

1. Long handled fan for gods and rings.

The fragrant sandal-wood, mango, aguru and clove trees  
 slowly swayed, touched by wind  
 And the fragrance spread in all directions  
 Disturbing the concentration of the community of sages.  
 The Lord of the world was full of praise,  
 Wondering if Nandana, the garden of the gods,  
 had fallen on earth.  
 He did not want to be parted from the place  
 even for a moment,  
 Now that fate had brought him here,  
 Shakuntala, the jewel among young women,  
 asked her companions :  
 "Friends, let us go and see  
 how the new grove of the sage is coming up.  
 We shall be back after weeding the trees we watered earlier."

*Shakuntala Chautisha*, 16th century

Tr. by Rajendra Prasad Das

## The Desire of Usha

SHISHU SHANKARA

SHISHU SHANKARA (Śiśu Sankara, 16th century) is the author of *Ushabhilasha* (Uṣābhilāṣa), written probably towards the close of the 16th century. The story of Usha and Aniruddha, taken from *Mahabharata* and *Harivamsha*, is primarily a love poem. This Kavya had considerable influence on many later poets including Upendra Bhanja, and has been very popular.

Receiving the message in her dream  
 the fair one rose from her bed,  
 "Where have you gone, O lord of my life?"  
 She cried in great misery,  
 "How cruel is my fate,  
 It allowed me just a glimpse of my treasure  
 Only to take it away.  
 I, an innocent girl who knows nothing,  
 Why have you done this to me, O fate !"  
 She of the lovely body,  
 Having tasted the bodily pleasures in her dream,  
 Was voicing these crazy words,  
 Being separated from her lover.

Her body languid in passion, her  
 Eyes liquid and staring, she lamented:  
 "Darling, just now you were in bed;  
 I gave you no offence and yet  
 Why did you leave ?  
 Have you no fear of bringing about the death of a woman ?"  
 Her mind anxious, words incoherent,  
 Eyes gazing intently at all the ten directions  
 She turned to her bed shyly for a moment,  
 Face lowered and breath coming out in gasps.

Her friend got up and rapidly sketching several portraits asked,  
 "How strangely you behave.  
 Please describe the same, my friend,  
 And identify his portrait,  
 You still a naive maid, yet to be married,  
 How can you be so unhappy  
 At the loss of a mate !  
 A *champak* flower may blossom  
 Hoping to attract the honey-drinking bumble-bee  
 But does it ever get the bee ?  
 O friend, please speak the truth,  
 Neither the sun nor wind  
 Can enter this inner apartment,  
 How could you bring in a man ?"  
 Hearing the words of her friend,  
 She relived the experiences of her sleep.  
 Her cheeks, breasts and loins trembling,  
 The new experience shaking her whole frame,  
 Her lips went dry and swooning, she fell to the ground.  
 Chitrlekha, her friend, splashed water on her face  
 And fanned her.  
 "How strange that fate  
 Brought rains to my friend's season of spring !"  
 She mused, and said,  
 "O my friend, clouds of delusion have taken a grip on you,  
 Tears fall on your breasts like drops of rain,  
 The sweet songs of the cuckoo bring you pain,  
 your red lips are purple  
 Like the *jamun* berry ripening in the rains,  
 Your breasts flutter like the dancing peacock,  
 The river of your emotions meets the ocean of sorrow,

Your consciousness behaves like lightning,  
 Flashing and vanishing alternately,  
 Please speak of your sweet and tender emotions."  
 The one with the face of the autumn full moon  
 Regained her consciousness  
 Smiled shyly in embarrassment;  
 Eager to voice her feelings, she remained tongue-tied,  
 Her joy sought expression,  
 But embarrassment made her forget the words.  
 Haltingly, totally absorbed in her dream,  
 She said, "O friend, he was the colour of the first rain clouds,  
 More handsome than a million love-gods,  
 He took me in dream."

As she spoke, tears darkened by the collyrium,  
 Fell in torrents from her liquid eyes,  
 'Be calm dear friend", said Chitrlekha.  
 Please describe him so that I could draw  
 A portrait and if you agree to the likeness and recognize,  
 I shall bring him here."  
 The clever maiden prostrated before her friend and said,  
 'Please do, I shall come to life only if I see that portrait."

Chitrlekha fixed her mind on the moon-face of  
 The Lord of the Blue Mountain,  
 The supremely beautiful painter of all forms,  
 And humbly sketched the portraits of all the men in the three worlds.  
 The doe-eyed one calmed her mind  
 And watched the portraits sketched by Chitrlekha,  
 Not finding her lover among those of the denizens of the nether world,  
     the world of the Nagas,  
 Her anxious eyes turned back.  
 Like the *chataki* hen turning back from the waters of the Ganga,  
 Towards the newly risen rain clouds.  
 She searched for him among the gods of heaven;  
 Her friend showed the portraits,  
 Calling out each name;  
 Indra, the king of gods,  
 Chandra, the Moon god,  
 Ravi, the Sun god,  
 Varuna, the god of the Ocean,  
 Kuvera, the god of wealth,

Yama, the god of Death,  
Anala, the Fire god,  
And these, the inhabitants of the world of Shiva,  
The divine dancers and musicians—  
The Gandharvas and Kinnaras,  
There were so many of them  
How can one enumerate!  
The woman saw all those,  
But like the caged cuckoo in the jewel palace,  
Not seeing the mango-blossom,  
She did not see her lover,  
Failing to evoke the signal of recognition  
From her friend after showing her  
The pictures of all in the world of Nagas and Devas,  
She showed the portraits of those of the worlds of demons and men.  
The beautiful palaces of these worlds,  
Fascinated the young one,  
And now came the turn of the city of Dwarabati,  
Like the king of the wild swans  
Sitting on the golden lotuses of the Manasa lake,  
There was the incomparable Dwarabati  
Surrounded by ramparts of gold set amidst the sea,  
The land brought forth by many jewels shining on earth  
Like the cool full-moon of autumn in the sky.  
The vision of the city made  
The heart of the one with the gait of the swan  
Lift up in joy: her eyes lit up,  
Like the chakora bird at the sight of the moon,  
There in the city were the men of the eighteen families.  
Following the lineage of Ugrasena  
She saw the palace of Mukunda.  
On entering the house of the Supreme Brahma,  
Her mind, charmed by the god of love,  
Was freed from all pain,  
She observed with great care  
The sixteen thousand one hundred and eight women of the palace.  
The tender woman was happy to see Basudeba,  
And catching the sight of Krishna and Balarama,  
An anxious and shy smile came into her face.  
And as her friend pointed her finger  
At Pradyumna, the love-god incarnate after being  
Destroyed by the great Yogi Hara,  
The doe-eyed one was shamed



Into covering her frame with the end of her cloth.  
 And then the young woman saw Aniruddha.  
 Just a glance and she felt her body opening.  
 She could not fix her eyes on him.  
 And yet the desire to look at him,  
 Made her cheeks blush.  
 Her body was shaking all over and  
 She felt herself opening up.  
 Her rounded thighs, shaped like  
 The golden trunk of the banana plant, stiffened,  
 Her Conch-shell-white throat was drenched in sweat,  
 Her face was suffused with blood.  
 The great close-set heaving breasts hardened.  
 The coquettish liquid eyes cast  
 A long glance at the face of the lover,  
 Like the bumble-bee drinking deep  
 The sweet honey of the *malati* blossom.  
 But embarrassment made the glance shift from the face,  
 This tender emotion at odds with her passion  
 That jewel among the jewels,  
 The crown-jewel of all the world's women,  
 Lost her mental control.  
 Linking up her heart to the open portals of her eyes.  
 She drank in the beauty of the portrait  
 And snatching it from her friend  
 Placed it against her breasts,  
 Bursting into ecstatic sighs,  
 She folded her arms around the portrait  
 And placing her lips against the lips in the portrait  
 Her whole being dissolved into it.  
 Chitrlekha aware  
 That the heart of her friend being beyond control  
 Like an elephant in rut,  
 Carefully retrieved the picture  
 And rolling it calmly addressed her friend:  
 "Dear friend, you have fallen in love  
 With one who is very difficult to have,  
 Your love has targetted one  
 Who stands unique in the fourteen worlds."  
 The moon-faced one sat with downcast eyes,  
 Her friend consoling with tender words.

Placing his hands at the feet  
Of the father of Usha's husband,  
Says Shishu Shankara:  
"O noble woman, please do not blame me."

From *Ushabhilasha*, 16th century

Tr. by Rajendra Prasad Das

## Cuckoo: For Twelve Months

SHANKAR DAS

SHANKAR DAS (Saṅkar Das, 16th century) is the author of the following poem addressed to a cuckoo and giving a description of twelve months covering the different seasons.

O my dear archer,  
What punishment to you!  
Says Kausalya, crying,  
Oh, oh, what do you gain, O Kaikeyi?  
O cuckoo, please listen.

This is *Margashirsha* month,  
And dews fall thickly,  
And cold wind blows again and again;  
What should be my son doing now,  
O cuckoo!

It's cold in *Pausha*  
It's unbearable, so painful,  
Without clothes, with only the hide of a tree,  
How greatly sorrowful it is,  
O cuckoo!

In *Magha* it is colder,  
so sorrowful to the poor,  
How Rama wanders in the forest,  
Away from home and bed,  
How sorrowful,  
O cuckoo!

They play with red powder in *Phalguna*  
Everywhere in every house,  
And the jewel of a blind woman is away from me.  
And I drown in the water of sorrow,  
O cuckoo!

The sun in *Chaitra*  
Dries up the land,  
The bodies sweat profusely,  
And the mind gets lost,  
O cuckoo!

The sun in *Baishakha* is scorching.  
When nobody can move out,  
And my son where is he,  
Under which tree,  
O cuckoo!

In *Jyeshtha* my eldest-born.  
With Sita and Lakshmana.  
They roam for ripe fruits in the forest,  
Oh, my destiny, how miserable,  
O cuckoo!

In *Ashadha* the clouds roar like tigers,  
The lights sparkle and vanish,  
And clouds are everywhere, so thick,  
O cuckoo!

See this *Shrabana*.  
The flood never stops,  
The rains fall incessantly,  
And my dear ones have no house, no place,  
Oh, how are they going to spend their days,  
O cuckoo!

When *Bhadra* comes  
The sky everywhere becomes clear,  
But how about my dear Sita?  
What does she think,  
O cuckoo!

In *Ashwina* the moon shines;  
It's so pleasant, so soothing;  
And the festivals are galore;  
Oh, how I wish he were here  
My sweet, sweet Rama,  
O cuckoo!

This is the great *Kartika* month:  
Thus says Sankar Das,  
And Rama, the jewel of the Raghu clan  
Along with Sita  
Suffered for twelve months,  
O cuckoo.

*Baramasi Koili*, 16th century

Tr. by J.M. Mohanty

## Chandramukhi

VISHNU DAS

VISHNU DAS (Viṣṇu Dās, 16th century) was famous for his Kavyas and Chautishas. Among his Kavyas *Premalochana* and *Kalabati* have been published. Among his unpublished Kavyas *Lilabati*, *Savitri Charita* and *Badu Shakuntala* may be mentioned. He is credited as the forerunner of Riti Yuga in Oriya literature.

Given below is *Chandramukhi Chautisha* (Cāndramukhi Cautiṣa).

Sitting close to the young lady  
whose eyes are like lotus petals.  
he, her lover, says:  
O moon-faced one,  
O cuckoo-voiced one,  
O my beautiful gold image,  
I plead with you to tell me  
how I would pass my time tomorrow  
when you'd not be with me.  
O flat-bellied one,  
you make the blackbird *khanjarita*  
flit a while at the corner of your eye.  
You smile, stand at a distance,  
and suddenly cast a sad look at me.  
O moon-faced one,  
would I see this sight again?  
Fate will take away  
all my happiness and make me suffer  
a prisoner's life.  
Who can describe the joy I have  
gazing moment by moment  
at your moon-like face!

O gifted one,  
whenever I recall the secret games  
we play in bed  
I feel delighted.  
O you with the gait of the elephant,  
the sight of the walking of a real elephant  
doesn't please me.  
Your breasts are full and heavy,  
and high as hills.  
The Creator made elephant heads  
and gold pitchers  
in imitation of your breasts.  
Place your hand on your breasts  
and think and tell me,  
O round-faced one,  
you'll not be away from me  
even for a moment  
as long as we breathe,  
O moon-faced one,  
fate would inflict this  
unbearable suffering on me.  
Would I be able to live then  
even for a moment?  
The sharp arrows of the love-god  
will take away my life  
as I pine to see your face.

O lotus-eyed one,  
I'm sure I will die  
if even for a moment I don't have  
the ecstasy of your tight embrace.  
My suffering will know no bounds.  
O lotus-eyed one,  
O you with teeth as white as the *kunda* flowers,  
the moment for which you look at me  
feels like an age.  
If you are not by my side  
my night does not end.  
O you with a face as beautiful as the moon,  
when you rest your chin  
on your hand for a while,  
I remember Lord Shiva and tell him:  
Lord, you sanctified my palms.

And I can't control myself  
and plant a sudden kiss on your cheek.  
would all this happiness  
be destroyed so soon  
by Fate who is intent  
on setting us apart?

You will spend your days  
without me, your servant,  
O lean-waisted one.  
O beautifier of my world,  
you shall not give in to sorrow,  
but practise patience.  
O moon-faced one,  
the sight of your suddenly  
looking at me and smiling  
is nowhere to be seen on earth.  
I will pine for the loving words  
you speak dispelling my sorrows.  
You know, my priceless gem,  
I keep awake  
all through the night,  
and suffer anxieties  
that never seem to end.  
And you read my mind,  
and to console me,  
speak the words of love I need.  
All this will be no more.  
My time will run out  
God knows all this.

When from under the thin apparel  
your thighs and breasts show,  
and my limbs grow heavy,  
the god whose banner has the sign of the fish  
knows and perfectly times  
his attacks on me.  
O moon-faced one,  
who can keep his desire under control  
when he sees the glowing forehead?  
Who can bear the heat of desire  
without being drenched in sweat?

O you with teeth  
like pomegranate seeds,  
I'm so scared,  
so scared of the arrows of the love-god.  
If you are not by me,  
close like the pupil of my eye,  
how and why do I hope to live?  
Your waist, as thin as the middle of a *damaru*.  
I cannot take my eyes off.  
Please don't deprive me of the sight.

I am not exaggerating, my love.  
I say I can't live for a moment without you.  
O moon-faced one,  
if I do not die,  
who will alleviate my sorrow,  
who but you, my coy and cunning lover?  
I am not exaggerating.  
You have bought up my heart.  
Fate is so cruel.  
the nectar is drying up  
just as I lift my cupped palm to drink it.  
Whenever I remember your gestures  
even for a while,  
I cannot control my desire.  
Who can forget you  
fondly laying your arm on my shoulder?  
O moon-faced one,  
I pray to you,  
do not ever withhold your love for me.  
When the god of love  
fills my body with burning desire,  
you will please come to my rescue.

The world has never experienced  
the love that you express  
through your eyes,  
that kind and loving look.  
O gem of a woman.  
I've done noble deeds in my past life,  
and so I am given your kindness and love.  
O soft-limbed girl,  
Your entreating look  
makes my body shiver.

staying in and operating  
from the corner of your eye,  
the god of love has subdued everybody in the world.  
I have always been  
praying to God for this gift:  
that I would ever be with you  
all day and night.  
What could be more cruel,  
O moon-faced one,  
than the denial of this by Fate?  
I thought the bliss of being with you  
would continue for ever.  
O you with youthful thighs,  
my body can no longer bear the pain.  
Revive me  
by making me sip  
the nectar of your lips.

O ocean of kindness,  
biting your lip you  
hold me in a tight embrace.  
O wealth of the poor.  
if pain is caused to your body,  
you will please not blame me.  
If a slave commits a mistake,  
he is to be pardoned.  
Please do think how and where  
a wrong deed is welcome.  
You lift my hand and place it  
on your breast,  
and then fondle my chin.  
O you my slow-walking girl,  
can I ever live without  
the memory of all this?  
O moon-faced one,  
I am praying to God with folded hands,  
please take pity on me,  
do not for a moment separate me  
from her who is  
the beauty of the world, whose body  
smells sweet like a lotus,



I have not seen the like of you  
anywhere in the world,  
as a lover, a playful, passionate lover,  
you heave sighs,  
and slowly close your eyes.  
That I cannot live without  
all those ecstasies,  
you do not realise,  
O moon-faced one!  
O lotus-faced darling,  
your palms are like young leaves.  
When you grow angry with me  
you move away and say  
you can't bear it any longer.  
I remember the brightness and beauty  
of your nectar-sweet smile,  
and, see, sorrow overwhelms me.

Your face smells like  
a lotus in full bloom.  
And Madana, the god of love,  
grows restless within,  
Can the moon ever compare  
in any respect  
with your face, my joyful lover?  
My long-standing hope  
blossomed into a flower  
after all these days.  
But Fate placed the fruit  
on my palm for a while  
and took it away,  
as I helplessly watched.  
O my moon-faced girl,  
sitting beside me in the moonlight,  
you bring your face  
close to mine.  
May God make the moon  
continue to shine!  
But the sari on your body  
keeps my love away from me.  
How ecstatic I grow  
to see you without it  
even for a while!  
You look at me

from the corner of your eye  
and smile and say:  
"You can't tolerate, my friend,  
even a piece of cloth  
embracing my body!"  
God is snatching  
food from the hands of the hungry one.  
He is taking you  
away from me.  
I request you,  
the one who feels and knows,  
never, never to forget me,  
O moon-faced one.  
You are the jewel in my crown,  
my pearl necklace,  
always with me,  
in times of need,  
in the hour of fulfillment  
O my priceless gem,  
save me.  
Don't leave me, please,  
even for a moment.

*Chandramukhi Chautisha*, 16th century

*Tr.* by Saubhagya Kumar Misra

### Three Poems

SHISHU ANANTA

SHISHU ANANTA (Śiśu Ananta, 16th century) was born at Balipatna, in Puri district. He founded Shishu, a religious community called after him. His most well-known work is *Hehu Udaya Bhagabal*, a semi-religious work dealing with philosophical themes, related to body, soul, supra-soul etc. A friend of Shri Chaitanya, he wrote a number of *bhajan*s, *chauhishas* and *stotras*, invariably with semimystical meanings.

Three of his poems are given below:

1

#### O My Crazy Mind!

O my crazy mind,  
See the eternal in the lotus of your heart.  
He who plays beyond all gods

The Protector, the Friend, the Formless One,  
 Long for his temple without mind.  
 Once the unspelt is spelt,  
 You will be redeemed.  
 Its colour is like the swan's egg,  
 A white form, strong and powerful,  
 And the Drop is hidden in the clouds  
 Attend to its narrow entry in *Brahma*.

From the One many have grown;  
 Don't suffer in illusion,  
 Don't arrange a float to cross the sea of life.  
 Say, you are ready to move always,  
 He is the Form in formlessness,  
 He is the new youth, track him,  
 Meditate on the Appearance without a shape  
 Where Yogamaya plays on the Veena.  
 Get the god of love united,  
 You will have wisdom at once,  
 Look straight at *Soma* orbit  
 Don't get confused, concentrate.

Construct a bridge with milk-nerves  
 You have the share of wisdom there,  
 Let your eye look backward  
 And tie a knot without a system.

The lotus bloom, without a stem,  
 See, how it is reversed,  
 You are confused without seeing the seed,  
 Without arranging its petals.

He sits on the pollens of lotus  
 Smiling always happy  
 He is Krishna, the Flute-holder,  
 He holds Radha, his half, on his lap,  
 In pretention, in disguise.  
 Says Ananta,  
 It is the eternal fragrance,  
 O wise men,  
 know it and sing!

2

Meditate on the Unspelt Word

Meditate on the Unspelt Word  
Sins of your million lives will be redeemed,  
Be in the untrodden path  
And measure the Immeasurable in your heart.

The lips and teeth shouldn't move.  
The throat and head shouldn't shiver,  
No rituals, no hymns, no worship,  
And perceive the Absolute Being,

Nobody can locate it  
Neither Brahma, nor Vishnu, nor Shiva,  
Sheshadeva meditated for a million years  
And yet couldn't get its trace.

Look at the lotus of thousand petals  
It is Krishna, the son of Nanda,  
On his left is Radha, the daughter of King Bhanu,  
And she glitters like lightning.

Hear the seven melodies  
How sweet,  
The being forgets itself in that sweetness  
And lives in that!  
Don't go on pilgrimages,  
Meditate on the names of Rama and Hari in your heart,  
Says Ananta Shishu  
You will be rescued from  
this well of a world.

*Abana Akhyara Japa*, 16th century

*Tr.* by J.M. Mohanty

3

The Market will Break up

The market will break up;  
There is nobody to do the marketing:  
The market is being broken up  
By five gang-leaders

Near *Golahata*, under the banyan tree,  
 Is the market,  
 The thieves are waiting to get inside it.  
 The merchant of Goodness  
     has opened his fare,  
 The buyer folds his baggage  
     with Names,  
 The care-taker named Mind  
     takes the toll,  
 And he has tied the rogue elephant inside,  
 If the rogue is freed accidentally  
 Says Ananta,  
 'The market will be ruined.

*Hata Bhangiba Ho*, 16th century

Tr. by J.M. Mohanty

## Draupadi's Torture

BHIMA DHIBAR

BHIMA DHIBAR (Bhimā Dhibar, 17th century) came from the community of fishermen. His only work *Kapatapasha* (Kapātapāśa) is very popular in Orissa.

Given below is a portion from it: *Draupadi's Torture*.

Listen O learned ones,  
 The city of Barunabanta is twelve *yojanas* away from Hastina.  
 Warrior Dusha ran swifter than wind,  
 Earth shuddering at his feet.  
 Entering Barunabanta he bellowed,  
 "Hey you Pandava-men, hey!"  
 Some of the people got scared and ran away.  
 Dushasana forced himself through the lion's gate.  
 The doorkeeper on guard informed Kunti:  
 "Duryodhan's brother Dusha is rushing in"  
 Hearing the report, the daughter of Kuntabhoja  
 Banned the entrance and said:  
 "Son, why not wait a little,  
 I would like to ask your reasons for rushing in,  
 What makes a jackal come to the lion's lair,  
 Please tell the whole story so as to solve this mystery".

With folded hands Dusha informed her:  
 "Your sons, mother, have done an evil deed,  
 Yudhishtira went to Hastina,  
 At a game of dice with Managovinda he lost his balance,  
 Staking the royal sceptre and the throne,  
 Nakula, Bhima, Arjuna and even Draupadi  
 He lost and Managovinda won.  
 Bhanumati's husband, the king, ordered me  
 To take Draupadi, dragging her by the hair:  
 O mother, please leave the door,  
 I am to enter the inner apartments,  
 Any delay will bring upon me the royal wrath".  
 Kunti seeking further details, enquired,  
 "Which was the stake at which Draupadi was lost?"  
 And replied Dushasana,  
 "In the first, Dharma's son lost the seven treasures,  
 In the second were staked and lost.  
 The sceptre and the throne.  
 In the third he lost your son Bhima,  
 In the fourth Arjuna was lost,  
 The sons of Madri were lost in the fifth,  
 In the sixth he lost the woman Draupadi  
 And only after losing his own body in the  
 Seventh he desisted."

Kunti countered:  
 "Draupadi, the virtuous, is the first married wife.  
 Were she lost in the first stake only,  
 She could have been taken.  
 This is a quarrel among you, brothers,  
 Why persist Dusha, with such a trifle,  
 Sometimes brothers might kill one another,  
 Tell me, how is Draupadi at fault?"  
 Hearing this Dushasana rolled his eyes,  
 Asking Kunti Devi to step aside, he pushed her down.  
 Kunti fell at the edge of the entrance  
 And cried:  
 "Have you left Dwaraka for your own abode, O Hari?  
 Having saved my sons from so many dangers  
 Have you no more pity for Yudhishtira?  
 Are my five sons dead?  
 Or else now could Dushasana enter our home;"  
 Kunti's loud warning rang out,

"O, daughter of Drupada,  
 Move into the inner apartment with Subhadra,  
 Dushasana has forced his entry into our home.  
 Make yourself invisible in the secret chamber."  
 Having heard the warning Subhadra quickly moved into the attic.  
 Scared, Draupadi's body was shaking all over,  
 Getting up in a hurry she ran breathing heavily.  
 Her hair and the cloth wrapped round the waist became loose,  
 She hid herself in the kitchen,  
 Like a doe terrified of the hunter  
 Eyes darting and mouth speechless.  
 Dushasana searched all the apartments;  
 The one shaped as an eye,  
 The one emitting sweet fragrance,  
 The one shaded light pink,  
 The colour or pomegranate seed.  
 The one translucent as fine silk,  
 The one inlaid with jewels,  
 The one shaped as an hourglass like the Kaustabha jewel  
 And then the restroom, named Indra-abakasha-pura,  
 The chamber where Yudhishtira retired at night,  
 In magnificence surpassing Indra's palace,  
 Eight miles square,  
 With inlays of all the eight varieties of jewels,  
 And diamonds and sapphires,  
 With pillars of coral,  
 It had strings of small pearls hanging  
 From the silken canopy.  
 New fly-shisks with emerald handles  
 Rested against the walls.  
 Unable to trace Draupadi there,  
 Dushasana retraced his steps wondering.  
 Approaching the kitchen he fell to his knees,  
 And looked around.  
 Draupadi's body resembling the rising sun,  
 Caught the eyes of an awestruck Dushasana.  
 "Did the sun give up the sky to be here  
 Or it if the moon living here, scared of the demon Rahu,"  
 He wondered.  
 Failing to solve the mystery  
 He took a few more steps  
 And only after reaching near  
 Did the warrior recognise Draupadi.

## Nine Poems

DINAKRISHNA DAS

DINAKRISHNA DAS (Dinakṛṣṇa Dās, 17th century) is famous for his *Rasakallola* Kavya. He is known as Jayadeva in Oriya literature for his lucid style. As he was a Vaishnav, he wrote all his works on the story of Shrikrishna, mainly on his amorous sports with the milkmaids. His other works are *Madhu Mangal*, *Nabakeli* and *Alankar Boli*. He is also a writer of *chaupadis* of which one hundred and fifty have been collected till now.

A portion of his summer description (*Rasakallola*, 15th canto) and eight other poems of his are given here.

### 1

#### Summer

In due course, Spring having come to an end,  
Summer made its entry.  
The rays of the sun became hot like fire,  
How can we convey to you, O good men,  
How hot the earth became?

Travellers danced like horses galloping on the battlefield.  
Like accomplished dancing women,  
Conjuring the whirling motion of the bumble-bee.

Men's agonies were akin to the sufferings  
Of a poor man with a large family.  
O learned men, rivers flowed in narrow strips,  
Pale like forlorn women bereft of  
The waters of love of the absentee husband.  
Mirages danced surpassing the wavy motions  
Of the eyes of the doe-eyed women.  
Forest fires chuckled like lightning in the lap of dark clouds  
O learned men, somewhere burning bamboos crackled  
Like the humming sound of women at intercourse.  
Even the sunstones suffered blisters  
Like the miser's servant undergoing privations.  
Ponds looked ill like women discarded by the lovers.  
O learned men, even the turtles, frogs and fishes.  
Became scrawny like beggars or devotees  
Practising austerities.



Bereft of the lotus thickets, elephants took  
 To deep forests.  
 Frogs, the enemies of *gandharvas*, wallowing in mud,  
 Raised a racket foaming at the mouths.  
 O learned men, birds in bowers remained motionless and mum  
 Like Yogis in deep meditation,  
 As one trying to save his life risks it in another's care.  
 The fox and the deer became shadows  
 In the shade of lions, throwing off their fear.  
 O learned men, even serpents likewise  
 Sheltered themselves under the wings of the peacock,  
 To escape the terrible heat.  
 The beauty of the wild creepers was gone,  
 Suffering the fate of women whose husbands are no more,  
 It was spring which made the creepers don  
 Bright new foliage.  
 But in course of time, O learned ones, spring departed,  
 And in its absence, his friend the god  
 Of love, shorn of vanity,  
 Lay quiescent in hearts,  
 The crickets sang in arbors,  
 But the path of romantic sports was closed,  
 Only the Arjuna tree, showing off flower arrows,  
 Tormented the ones without their lovers.  
 O learned men, some traveller, forced to move  
 Under the heat of passion, was soon exhausted,  
 To sit under the many-legged banyan,  
 Bees stored honey like misers storing liquor,  
 Some established watering places  
 In the care of Brahmins,  
 Learned men, some favoured by God  
 Lived in houses cooled by fountains,  
 Smearing their bodies with camphor and sandal-paste.  
 Some spent their days listening to poetry and songs,  
 Or the melodious flute or *vina*  
 Or watching dance performances.  
 Some others sat in secluded corners with women,  
 Spraying one another with sandal-paste.  
 Learned men, some others went out boating.  
 And some scared of sweltering heat  
 Never let go the handle of the palm-frond fans.

Some, at the end of the day, went for a swim,  
 Some sat on the ground at a cool place  
 Waiting for cool breeze.  
 O learned men, how long can I speak in this vein?  
 The body only craves  
 For things that cool.

From *Rasakallola*, 17th century

Tr. by Rajendra Prasad Das

2

The Kadamba Tree

"Friend, who is this looking so handsome  
 Under the *kadamba* famed for romantic sports,  
 Standing in *tribhanga* with a slow smile,  
 His head decorated with slanting peacock-feathers,  
 Making the mad and the maddening meet.  
 The ear-pendants shaped like the mythical *makara*,  
 Dangling against the cheeks look bewitching,  
*Banamala*, the long thick garland of forest flowers,  
 Hanging from the neck,  
 Yellow silk wrapped round the waist,  
 The bells of the waistband ringing in unison,  
 Glossier than the new rain-bearing cloud,  
 With pearl studs on the nose,  
 O friend, he destroys my calm.  
 "Playing on his charming flute,  
 He will make you mad;  
 Otherwise", says Dinakrishna  
 "Who is going to love him!"

*Keli Kadamba*, 17th century

Tr. by Rajendra Prasad Das

3

O, My Friend

O my friend, some say how terrible love is,  
 Falling in love with Shyama, the cheat.  
 See, how has the whole thing fared!

Fascinated, O messenger maid, I loved him smiling,  
 And the results were tears,  
 Expecting joy, I have to wear the garland of sorrow,

I burnt myself in the sacred fire of love  
 But unhappiness far surpassed any happiness.  
 Igniting my passion and making me mad about him,  
 He vanishes without trace  
 Like the sparks flying off the blacksmith's bellows.

"Luv" who brought the three letters to earth.  
 At the beginning showering unique bliss,  
 It snuffs out life at the end.  
 I never knew,  
 Love and separation brought such misery,

"Krishna's love melts stones,"  
 Says, Dinakrishna.

*Re Sangata*, 17th century

*Tr.* by Rajendra Prasad Das

4

Friend, Dear as Life

O friend, dear as life  
 You fell into the snares of Krishna's love.  
 For his companionship, you left the ways of your family,  
 Sinking in calumny spread by others  
 You spoke to him enchanting words  
 Sweeter than nectar,  
 Only as so many sacrificial offerings.  
 Fathoming his heart is impossible,  
 A heart like that of the bumble-bee.  
 You allowed yourself to be misled  
 Only to stumble now.  
 In drinking poison, can there be a safe dose?  
 If you exhibit your heart  
 Who is there to sympathise?  
 Listening to the deceitful talks of another  
 Day and night, you now drown in shame.  
 Gathering dew-drops with great care,

How could you imagine to quench your thirst!  
 Believing in the impossible,  
 What an intelligence you have!  
 And now you strike your palms against your forehead!  
 Had you only thought of this earlier,  
 Why should you have suffered such torment?  
 Anyway, what good is there saying this now!  
 "Thinking of the feet of the couple,  
 We raise our folded hands to Shyama's love",  
 Says, Dinakrishna.

*Prana Sajani*, 17th century

Tr. by Rajendra Prasad Das

5

The Couple Meet

Clouds laced with lightning  
 Poured in torrents.  
 Under the spell of the love-god  
 The bodies of Shyam and Shyama  
 Came together with great pleasure.

Was the infatuated bumble-bee  
 Madly kissing the yellow sapphire?

Or did the golden creeper  
 Embracing the dark *tamala* tree  
 Come on the path of the strong wind?

Was the blue peacock performing  
 A dance never seen earlier  
 Enfolding the golden earth?  
 Or did the golden oriole  
 Call out from the emerald cage?  
 Her dress and makeup re-done after making love,  
 The languid damsel pleased her lover and herself,  
 "But", says Dinakrishna,  
 "The love-god only gave a deep sigh in utter desolation".

*Jugala Milana*, 17th century

Tr. by Rajendra Prasad Das

## 6

## Love in a Boat

Said one Gopi,  
 "Hear what the son of Jashoda did one day,  
 We cared for none but him,  
 One of course got terribly excited speaking of him,  
 I know you would burst out laughing,  
 When you heard what he did.  
 One day all of us, the daughters of cowherds,  
 Got up when it was still dark;  
 Lighting the earthenlamps we began churning curd  
 For the market in Mathura.  
 The noise the churning produced  
 Was like that of the roaring sea,  
 And why not!

Fifty churners on the move in one household,  
 Elsewhere sixty, and seventy at another,  
 One hundred each in any number of houses,  
 And those with more milk even two hundred going.  
 The happy cowherd-women sang of Krishna.

One said,  
 Keshava the kind, Kanha the lover in arbors,  
 With eyes like lotus,  
 The playful ocean of mercy, rider of Garuda,  
 Gobind, the king of Gokula country,  
 Son of Jashoda and the lover of the gopis.

One said,  
 O, the mischievous boatman dark as a cloud  
 Shri Banamali, our companion in Braja, was really  
 The wealth of the poor and the protector of  
 The deprived,

One said,  
 With a face bright as the moon,  
 Parting his hair in the middle in line with the  
 Vertical *chita* mark on forehead,  
 Kanha the fickle lover always full of deceit  
 Was the priceless treasure of the devotees.

One said,  
 The uprooter of the Arjuna trees,  
 The destroyer of the vanity of young women,  
 Wearing his hair in a tidy bun slung over the neck,  
 Loving to play hide and seek in the forest,  
 Exuberant like the ocean,  
 Always delightful like a new lover,  
 He held up the mighty Mountain,  
 Humbling the proud,  
 He also was stealing butter !

One said,  
 He never looked straight  
 Look how he bent his handsome face playing the flute !  
 But, whether healer or magician,  
 His name alone could be an antidote  
 To the deadly poison of even Shesha, the king of serpents.  
 Again, always so gentle  
 Never opened his lips without a bow,  
 Didn't he suck the life out of  
 Putana, the ogre, in a trice ?  
 Endless wishfulfilling tree  
 Capable of delivering from misery,  
 The eternal unshakable mountain of grace,  
 Remover of all suffering,  
 The most perfect one in the three worlds,  
 Pervading the universe,  
 The object of meditation of Sthanu,  
 The immobile Shiva,  
 Killer of the demon Baka,  
 Protector of the poor and the destitute,  
 Eating curd and milk,  
 His head adorned by *kadamba* blossoms,  
 Wearing a garland of the *kadamba* flowers,  
 Playing the flute,  
 Young, handsome, standing in *tribhangi* pose  
 Embodying all qualities,  
 The Lord beyond all qualifications.

One said,  
 What a lord !  
 Only a boatman, but where had he gone !

Maybe, gathering flowers,  
 But keep off, when he walks by swollen with vanity,  
 With the flute in his mouth,  
 His face all aglow,  
 This Muralidhara, the flute-player, makes  
 You lose your sense.  
 Sister, this wicked imp  
 Is evil incarnate,  
 Trust him and in a trice he sinks your boat.  
 What impudence !

*Naba Keli*, 17th century

Tr. by Rajendra Prasad Das

7

Hail, Jagannath !

Hail, Jagannath, the Lord of the Bluemountain !  
 Handsome as the newly-gathering rain cloud  
 Of gracious mien, adored by a golden thread,  
 With dark and fragrant *dayana* leaves  
 around the topknot,  
 Musk staining the forehead,  
 A string of pearls sparkling around the neck,  
 The emerald pendants swinging from the ear-lobes,  
 Lovely medallion of nine gems hanging against the chest,

The waistbelt, encircling the hourglass waist,  
 The body smeared with white sandal-paste  
 And the beautiful glance of the eyes,  
 Billions of love-gods are no match to His beauty.  
 Red lips setting off the pomegranate-seed teeth,  
 The wristlets and armlets encrusted with jewels,  
 The *dayana* garland swaying on the chest,

Round eyes on the black face  
 Like bumble-bees whirling inside the blue lotus  
 Conch, disc, mace and lotus,  
 Decorating the four arms,  
 Beautiful as a billion love-gods  
 He charms the three worlds.

The refuge of devotees  
And the storehouse of deliverance,  
In Him, this humble Dinakrishna  
Prayerfully seeks refuge.

*Jaya Jaya Jagannatha*, 17th century

Tr. by Rajendra Prasad Das

8

Chant the Name !

Chant the name "Kala Kanhai", O my mind,  
Should you so chant, your sorrows would not exist.  
Sound emanates from the abode of no-sound.  
The one of no-form exists  
And not the one with form.  
He comes, he goes,  
No barriers exist for him,  
And yet my mind, you haven't recognised Him !  
The white lily blooms in the dark Kalindi lake.  
I stretch my arms to gather the flower,  
The full-blown flower reverses itself  
Folding upon itself,  
And yet the bumble-bee is crazy after it.  
When the customers were gathering,  
The market-keeper was on constant alert,  
As the fordsman, he took every care of the ford;  
Now that the market is closed and the shops shut,  
Why should the record-keeper remain ?  
That is why the waters are so clean,  
Moons in billions lighting the surface,  
*Kishora*, the eternal youth  
And *Kishori*, the eternal young woman,  
Are at play and there is neither day nor night.  
Tied to wealth, wife and children  
You claim to be the house-master,  
This great joy will end in a trice;  
They carry your corpse to the cremation ground  
Your life has been in vain,  
Your heart has neither kindness nor piety,  
"Take refuge in Him" says Dinakrishna,  
"You will not have this body again,  
No matter how badly you search".

*Bhaja Mana Kala kanhai*, 17th century

Tr. by Rajendra Prasad Das



## 9

## Crazy Mind

Crazy mind !  
 The body like a pot of clay will melt one day  
 Your body will not last for ever.

You see the walls of the house, worn and cracking,  
 Yet, why are you still attached to it?

Taking his seat above the six vital centres,  
 The blacksmith goes on creating  
 Forms on the fire-anvil.

When the blacksmith leaves the smithy  
 Where does he go ?

The name of the smith is Kanhai,  
 Thus says Dinakrishna,  
 Meditating upon His feet.

*Manuan Bai*, 17th century

*Tr.* by Rajendra Prasad Das

## Selections

## DHANANJAYA BHANJA

DHANANJAYA BHANJA (Dhanañjaya Bhañja, 1636-1701) was a king of Ghumusar in the Ganjam District and was also the grandfather of Upendra Bhanja. Among his poems *Madan Manjari*, *Tripuramanjari*, *Ichhabati*, *Anangarekha* and *Raghunath Vilas* may be mentioned. He translated *Shalilottra*, a book on horses, from Sanskrit. He was also writer of *chaupadis* and *chautishas*.

Three of his poems are given below.

## 1

## The Flag of the Love-God

Listen after this: Enters the king of seasons  
 For the beautification of the world.  
 It is the flag of the victory of the bodyless one.

The forests grew leaves, decorated with flowers,  
 Creeper-covered trees, like well-disposed women.  
 The black bee hums in ecstasy. It is drunk with nectar,  
 The forest fire for the separated. The mood is in the  
     hands of the enjoyer.  
 The wind from the Malaya hills approaches slowly,  
 The creepers of the patience of the youth started trembling at this.  
 The yoga of the yogins breaks; they keep the company of women.  
 The newly intoxicated make love with one another.  
 The girl with her friends, having seen the play of the love-god's arrow,  
 Her mind is filled with remorse.  
 Which newly matured girl has not received the love of the beloved ?  
 Having seen sweet love, the mind moves swiftly  
 The night's new young lady became the cynosure of all the eyes,  
 The pure moon-faced one, the one with a cuckoo's voice,  
 The one clad in beautiful moonlight, the one with the smell of the  
     lily flowers,  
 The one decorated with jasmine buds, the one whose lot is the  
     intoxication of Mathura,  
 Seeing whom the sages lost the balance of their minds.  
 Let the thought of romance be with the young women;  
 All living beings are created with the thought of *Rasa* at heart.  
 They resound with their narration; they seek pleasure in pairs.  
 Noticing such a time, the moon-faced one out of curiosity.  
 Walked with her friends, saying "Let's go, see the garden;  
 Let's worship the husband of the love goddess. Having pleased him,  
     let's ask for a boon.  
 We shall entreat him, so that he takes pity on us."  
 Hearing this, the companions immensely happy in mind  
 Said, "Come, O girl, slowly walk along;  
 Let the garden of yours be purified by your presence,  
 With the dust of your feet let it be fortunate !"  
 So saying the companions walked in happy spirits,  
 Making pleasant conversation, followed the dear one.  
 Sitting surrounding her, with the pretty-haired one in the centre.  
 As the moon in the sky shines midst the stars,  
 Someone holds the fan, someone the mirror;  
 Holding the decorated fans, the maids are in service  
 Someone making her walk, another sprinkling camphor.  
 Holding the hands of her companions the girl walks slowly.

## 2

## The Ample Thighs

O one with ample thighs, whatever you told me  
 All the time I am obsessed with it.  
 O pot-breasted one,  
 The arrow of the love-god is taking my life.  
 Who can save me from this ?  
 O my life, you alone know the secrets of exchange.  
 You give kisses one after the other  
 O one with dense tresses, you cover your face  
     with your hair.  
 My heart sinks at the thought of it.  
 At the time of our meeting, hearing the roar of thunder,  
 You embraced me, O *champak*-coloured one !  
 I do not forget you for a moment.  
 I wear you like the bejewelled chain on my neck.  
 I am telling you, O lovely one !  
 The remembrance of that pleasure increases the pain.  
 Without you, my body is intoxicated,  
 O dense pot-breasted one, I am your slave.  
 Understand my agony, make love:  
 So says the intoxicated Bhanja King.

*Ghanajaghana*, 17th century

Tr: by D.P. Pattanaik

## 3

## The Swaying Gait

Swaying and smiling you come:  
 Shall I see it again with my eyes ?  
 One day I kissed your eye-lids;  
 You embraced my neck with sweet words in your mouth.  
 I painted your breast with natural colours.  
 It pains, the remembrance of love.  
 You embrace and kiss me tightly.  
 You have poured so much love into me.  
 I drink the nectar from your lips.  
 You have given great ecstasy, says Bhanja King.

*Dhali Dhali*, 17th century

Tr: by D.P. Pattanaik

## Four Poems

DINABANDHU RAJ HARICHANDAN

DINABANDHU RAJ HARICHANDAN (Dīnabandhu Rāj Harichandan, 17th century) wrote hundreds of *chaupadis*, of which one hundred and fifty have been published in different collections. He has been compared with the best poets of Oriya literature like Upendra, Dinakrishna, Bhupati Pandita and Lokanath Bidyadhara.

Four of his *chaupadis* are given below :

1

Where did you Learn ?

Where did you learn this art, O friend,  
To be in a warrior's profession without  
Bow and arrow or even your arms ?  
One day under the *kadamba* tree on the banks of Yamuna,  
The holder of the flute  
Wounded by the arrows of the glances  
of the queen of *Nagaris*  
asked thus :

"My friends; the arrow of your eyes smoothly  
Entered my heart.  
The moment you throw a backward glance,  
You could pierce even a stone.  
Not seen, it sinks into the heart.  
What a mystery !  
It wounds the heart, but pleases the eye."  
These words of her dearest one  
Embarrassed the queen among women,  
And she hid her face behind the veil.  
Dinabandhu sings of this romance.

*Kahun Shikhilu?, 17th century*

*Tr. by Rajendra Prasad Das*

2

She Knows

How many tricks of love she knows :  
You look when not looking,

When I took, you do not,  
 But only scratch the earth with your toes.  
 Smiling, you favour me with a side-long glance,  
 Pretending to be really looking at your companions.  
 To strike a lovely pose,  
 How you raise your languid arms,  
 Your sinuous frame becoming  
 The wish-fulfilling creeper of the god of love !  
 Loving me in the secrecy of your heart,  
 Never daring to approach me in the open,  
 How miserly indeed are your ways !  
 Please do not make me feel a stranger.  
 Why didn't you accept my proposition !  
 O fair maiden,  
 Am I a *ketaki* flower, scaring the bees away ?  
 O, the jewel among the women Gokul,  
 Says Dinabandhu Raja,  
 This is what is brought by  
 Newly aroused love.

*Janai Se*, 17th century

*Tr.* by Rajendra Prasad Das

### 3

#### Not Knowing

"Not knowing, I loved,  
 Who could know, O friend;  
 Pining only brings misery  
 And when I give up, I have no other refuge.  
 My friends, giving words to their objections,  
 Forbade me, reprimanded me;  
 By not listening to them, I earned this !  
 From the day I loved,  
 My resolve to remain virtuous vanished.  
 My reticence evaporated under the heat of passion.

Death is a better alternative to loving another.  
 This trouble has no end,  
 Nor is there a way of escape,  
 Young as I was, I secretly pined for him day and night,  
 That was my mistake ordained by destiny.  
 This love, this passion,  
 This body can no longer bear.  
 O friend, please tell me:  
 How can I be rid of this torment ?

My mind was led astray,  
I am dying every moment.  
I suffer because of love,  
Now that it is done, please help me.

Their friend having spoken,  
The companions felt relieved.

"Love is never sweet,  
Desire for love only brings pain".  
Hearing this, the fish-eyed one  
Spent her days thinking of the one  
With a dark-cloud body,  
Says, Dinabandhu Raja.

*Na Jani*, 17th century

*Tr.* by Rajendra Prasad Das

4

I Know, it is Terrible

I know it is too terrible  
Falling in love with the eyes !

The heart is jolted,  
When the eyes catch that glance.

Looking at her never brings contentment,  
And the moment she remains unseen  
The heart is full of longing.

Her looks might contain poison or nectar,  
But it saws through the heart all the same.

As you gaze upon her, you lose consciousness,  
And all movements cease.

When she is away, you see her everywhere;  
And your days and nights never end.

What does not new love do ?  
Says Dinabandhu Raja.

*Janili Ati*, 17th century

*Tr.* by Rajendra Prasad Das

## The Song of Knowledge

NATHIA LOKANATHA

NATHIA LOKANATHA (Nāthia Lokanātha, 17th century) is the author of *Gyanodaya Koili* and *Guru Shishya Chautisha*. The following passage is from *Gyanodaya Koili*.

O Koili,  
The lotus blooms in the Kalindi river  
The three streams are all in the lotus  
The Swan flies in the void.  
Who can speak of the glory of the Swan !  
The Swan is at play  
Above *Amana*, the region beyond perception

Koili,  
He, whom the sages seek,  
Who is never found by the wise  
In spite of their keen search,  
That Swan is at play  
In the abode of the void  
Beyond the narrow channel.  
Fix your mind at the feet of the Swan.  
You shall be rid of all your sins.

Koili,  
At the entrance of the heavenly paradise  
The Goloka Baikuntha,  
The way lies between the rivers Ganga and Jamuna,  
Beyond the *Golahata* region of the Brahman  
And there in the void  
Is the hidden abode of the Swan  
And the Swan has the infinite in its womb.

Koili,  
All the relatives and friends you have gathered around you,  
Shall disown you the moment you shut your eyes,  
Without wasting a moment  
They shall remove you from your home to the  
cremation ground.  
Therefore chant the name of Hari  
To be freed from all bondage and sin.

Koili,  
 None of those you see with your eyes  
 Shall go with you.  
 Here none is bothered with anyone else,  
 You can neither bring nor take away anything.  
 There is no refuge but for the Name;  
 Surrender yourself to the Name for liberation.

Koili,  
 Let not your mind drift.  
 Always remain awake, remembering the Name.  
 Control the Sun and the Moon :  
 The two breaths of the two nostrils.  
 Lift your consciousness  
 Taking it to the abode of the Super-conscious,  
 Merge your consciousness with the Super-conscious  
 And immortality is yours  
 Through the four cycles of time.

Koili,  
 Lust, Anger, Greed, Delusion, Pride and Envy :  
 These six enemies distract you,  
 Not allowing you to meditate even for a moment.  
 They never leave you alone to be yourself.  
 Attaching themselves to you  
 Like your own shadow.  
 But, be of firm resolution,  
 Freeing your mind of all illusion.

Koili,  
 The effulgence is born of Void  
 Where neither day nor night exists  
 Take yourself beyond the shadow of that light  
 And see the coming together of Jiva and Parama—  
 The individual self and the Supreme Self.  
 Remember the individual has no separate identity  
 Outside of the Supreme.  
 Both are the same, of the same substance.

Koili,  
 The three streams flow.  
 And at the source is Nirakara, the Formless,  
 Beyond the glowing light  
 The Swan shines in the abode of the Void.  
 Should you grasp it for a moment  
 All your impurities shall be liquidated.



Koili,  
See the play of the Formless  
Beyond the three streams  
At the foot of the blue wishfulfilling tree,  
The Swan plays all the time on the waters of Jamuna.  
It drinks by reversing itself,  
Its beak coming onto its tail,  
And the flow stands reversed.

Koili,  
Your life, like the waterdrop  
Always moving on the lotus,  
Will come to an end any moment.  
Reverse the flow of breath,  
Lifting it to the Brahmarandhra orifice above,  
Fix your consciousness to that spot,  
Do not hesitate,  
Do not allow your mind to drift.  
Remember, the robbers are always there  
To take away all your wealth.

Koili,  
His quarters are above the shining Void—the *Thula Sunya*,  
Which contains the totality of creation.  
There, the Great Swan rests.  
None can locate Him  
But you can reach Him  
By proper service to your Guru,  
This was revealed by Lord Shiva of the three eyes,  
He made Nathia correctly comprehend  
The secret.

Koili,  
The Swan is calling from the Void  
The never-ending calls can be heard,  
Perk up your ears and look up,  
Fix your gaze upon Him:  
You will see the Swan playing before your eyes.  
Give up all fears;  
Firm up your faith.

Oh Koili,  
Should your steps falter,  
The way will be lost.  
Look, the lid is off.  
Golden treasures come as showers to you.  
Guard against the waves of hesitation;  
Only then will the thieves be caught.  
Should you doze off.  
The thief shall enter the house

Oh Koili,  
Darkness has made you blind,  
You failed to make the light within you shine,  
Bestowing all your care on dead embers.  
You neglected the invaluable treasure within,  
Wake up at least now,  
Be firm and control your enemies.

Koili,  
There is the tri-junction of the three streams,  
Above that is Niranjana—the one free from all stain,  
Your sins shall evaporate,  
Give up all argumentation,  
Hold Him firmly to your heart.  
Only then shall you know yourself,  
That self is the Supreme self.

Koili,  
Calm your five natures  
Control the breath.  
None knows the secret,  
Turn your gaze inward,  
Pay no attention to the external icons.

Koili,  
Go and look for the Divine.  
Find out where he resides.  
If you look carefully.  
You will find Him not far from you.  
Light the lamp of your consciousness  
And see the God,  
The God is atop the temple of your body.

Koili,  
 In the great *mandale* circle of eternity,  
 At the portals of the abode of non-sound,  
 Keep on meditating.  
 You will hear the sound of the non-sound,  
 Fix that in your heart,  
 Brahmahood is yours upon catching the non-sound:

Koili,  
 The one who has void as his form,  
 Himself embodies the void,  
 Void hiding Himself in the Void,  
 His form invisible,  
 To your intent gaze will be revealed  
 Only His shadow,  
 You will find that shadow on play  
 Before your eyes,  
 Like sparks flying from the burning torch.

Koili,  
 The path to the abode of the Great Swan  
 Stretches before you:  
 Gaining entrance, you shall find Brahma.  
 The path however is full of dangers and pitfalls,  
 But yours shall be the path  
 Through steadfast service at the feet of the Guru.

Koili,  
 The way is beyond  
 That narrowest of orifices where breath has its origin.  
 But the door is unlocked,  
 Look with a light heart,  
 See the lotus is in full bloom, spreading its fragrance.  
 The lotus is a brilliant white,  
 But how strange,  
 Having shed its seed it rests in the Void !

Koili,  
 The circle of the Void goes round,  
 At the central point, the heart of the circle  
 The Swan is at play  
 From there the winds start  
 There, the wise words of the Vedas  
 Have their beginning and end.  
 The drums give out the five sounds,  
 That sound reverberates  
 Throughtout the Universe—the Brahmanda.

Koili,  
 To gain an entry through that door  
 Destroy the twenty-five adversaries,  
 Fix your gaze at the centre of the two eyebrows,  
 Tear up all apprehensions of the world,  
 Meditate on the words of the revered Guru,  
 If you fail,  
 You will be one more Lokanathia.

Koili,  
 At the great pavilion of the Great Void  
 Is the great round circle.  
 Through this lies the way,  
 Narrow and constricted, thin as the leg of a mosquito  
 And yet, hordes of mad elephants  
 Enter through the passage.  
 Thread your mind through the passage  
 All your cravings for ephemeral things  
 Shall vanish like mirages.

Koili,  
 Guard the door of the Light  
 Where resides Nirakara, the Formless.  
 Meditate on that light above the Light,  
 The dark night comes to an end  
 The Lamp keeps on burning,  
 Guard it with care  
 And be a Yogi,  
 The one who has realised  
 That he is identical with the Supreme,  
 Through all the cycles of time.

Koili,  
 Reverse the essence of the Union,  
 Turn it back to the source,  
 Placing the Prana essence above the Bindu germ.  
 Get hold of the Moon,  
 Bar the Moon's door,  
 Get rid of the manifestations,  
 The aspects of the Moon,  
 And imprison the essence.

Koili,  
 Greed, Delusion and Lust  
 These three eat up all your gains,  
 Let go of your fickleness,  
 Turn back your eyes,  
 Have them in the reverse direction  
 Towards the west, and not the usual east;  
 Do not be apprehensive about not attaining,  
 When the waves of grace  
 Come rolling  
 You will find concentration.

Koili,  
 In spite of all my efforts  
 You still have no understanding;  
 Why don't you follow orders,  
 You are the creator of your enemies;  
 You can cut off their wings with the sword of your wisdom;  
 The breath moves across a space of only twelve digits,  
 Controlling the breath will still  
 The flow of the river.

Koili,  
 At the portals of *Shrihata Patana*,  
 The abode of Grace and Bliss,  
 At the centre of the Central *Sushumna* Channel  
 He is at residence,  
 Having the form of the formless,  
 Containing the *Sushumna* within His womb.  
 This is the truth, says Guru,  
 This is the most precious possession  
 Of the *siddhas*, the ones who have had the realisation.

Koili,  
 The fastening chains of the door  
 Hang down through the sixteen Dambaru knots,  
 Free the hood from the knotted coils of the serpent,  
 Defeat the enemies,  
 And gain the fortress.  
 Only with your success  
 Shall come the realisation,  
 Purify yourself by chanting the eternal *mantra*.

Koili,  
From the banks of the Sarasvati  
Beside the shores of the Ganga and the Jamuna  
The sea is visible,  
But the way is narrow,  
Thin as a fine needle point.

Koili,  
That is the ford  
To the Kailasa of Hara,  
The abode of Shiva:  
The way is through the syllable Ha:  
It leads to the top of the Tree  
Where the Swan has reversed itself.  
Meditate on the feet of the Swan  
And have your sins destroyed.

Koili,  
Mysteriously the river reverses its flow,  
Moving back to the source,  
Grasp the meaning in correct measure.  
It has neither shadow  
Nor does it cause any delusion.  
The Guru solved the riddle  
And revealed the secret.  
Do not give up the path of liberation,  
Says the humble (Loka) Nathia,  
The disciple of Trilochana.

From *Gyanodaya Koili*, 17th century

Tr. by Rajendra Prasad Das

## The Story of Manikya

PURUSHOTTAM DAS

PURUSHOTTAM DAS (Puruṣottam Dās, 17th century) wrote a historical Kavya *Kanchi Kaveri* (Kāñchi Kāveri) by name. In this work the expedition of Purushottam Deva, a Gajapati king of Orissa of the fifteenth century, to Kanchi has been described. He is credited with the writing of *Ganga Mahatmya*, *Kanjianla Brata* and *Rai-Damodar Katha*.

The following passage is from *Kanchi Kaveri*.

In the bloom of youth, tender of age,  
Her complexion golden like *the ketaki* flower,

Head round as a coconut,  
 A line of vermillion at the parting of the hair,  
 And collyrium in the inner eyelids,  
 Her long tresses gathered in a lovely bun,  
 A round vermillion mark on her forehead,  
 She could charm even the austere sages.

Her doe-eyes with eye-lashes painted in black,  
 Her smile resembling the red *bandhuka* blossom.  
 Her nose shaped as a sesame flower  
 Adorned with studs, rings and pendants,  
 Circular ear-rings, one in each ear,  
 Shining like the planets Jupiter and Venus,  
 The upper ear with ornaments resembling both the bud  
 And the flower of jasmine, each more beautiful than the other,  
 A string of beads and pearls adorning the neck,  
 Bangles on her wrists shining like gold,  
 Fingers with rings and the arms with armlets,  
 A red silken cord with floral knots  
 On her upper arms, streaked in sweat,  
 Her saree, the colour of dark clouds,  
 Wrapped under the left shoulder,  
 Normal with women pedlars,  
 Her tapering golden thighs resembling a reversed banana stem,  
 A black band around her left leg,  
 Rings on toes, red lac liquid staining the feet.  
 With a pair of heavy close-set breasts,  
 Pressing down her hour-glass waist,  
 Her gait that of a majestic elephant,  
 A slow smile playing on her lips,  
 Revealing her small teeth resembling pomegranate seeds  
 Her liquid voice melodious like that of the cuckoo,  
 Born as a part-incarnation of Radha of incomparable beauty,  
 Manikya walked down the road with a basket on her head.  
 She saw two horsemen from Puri approaching,  
 One was fair and the other dark:  
 Thankful of her good fortune she quickened her pace  
 Swaying under her burden  
 If these rich customers make a purchase  
 She could return home early with a nice profit;  
 She mused and ran.

The two riders, aware of her long devotion,  
Took pity and decided to oblige her  
By purchasing curd.  
And in the process revealing themselves to her.

As Manikya came near, the one wearing the golden  
Garment made the horse stop.  
The maid brought her basket down.  
Covering her head with her veil.  
She came playfully forward.  
Her smiling face partly covered by cloth,  
She looked up at the riders.

The two brothers enchanted by her beauty were all praise.  
"You are lucky, dear cowherd maid.  
Tenderness, grace, beauty and all bodily good-marks are yours  
Your beauty would disturb the sages.  
You remind us of Radhika, the cowherd maid of the Dvapara age.  
With her memory returning to us  
We also remember the selling of curd in the market of Mathura  
And the sports in the arbors of the forest."

Praise be to you, Manikya,  
For charming the two riders.  
How could you earn so much merit  
That Jagannath was happy to see you.  
Radha of Dvapara was indeed born as Manikya.  
The feet of the cowherdess Manikya  
Are the eternal refuge of Purushottama Das.

The Ones whom Brahma and Shiva  
Are unable to find through meditation;  
She was able to bargain with.  
Manikya was thrilled  
Without bending down, she gazed at them,  
Herself transfixed.  
These young riders, one white, the other black,  
Young and handsome like the god of love.  
Aren't they too tender for an expedition to another country?

Thought Manikya: "Haven't I seen many horses, elephants and soldiers?  
But did I ever see horses like these  
One black, the other white, matching their black and white riders.



For the black horse, the rider is white,  
 For the white horse, the rider is black,  
 The contrast adding lustre.  
 These riders must be very great warriors  
 With stores overflowing with riches;  
 Youthful sons of wealthy men  
 They are out on an expedition  
 My heart is theirs since that first look.  
 Oh, how vast must be their army !  
 How many elephant-riders,, horse-riders and footsoldiers  
 And their hordes of helpers !  
 Even in youth the bounties of the god of love do not last”

She was very disturbed in her mind because of aroused passion.  
 She wondered if the two would take any milk and curd from her.  
 “Let me have a good look at them.  
 Let them take all I have, without even paying for them.”

Thinking thus Manikya urged.  
 “Water is near, do not delay your meal.  
 Delicate as you are, please eat now.  
 I have milk, curd, cheese and ghee here.  
 Please take whatever you want.”  
 Her face partly covered,  
 Voice soft and seductive, yet deep as that of the cuckoo  
 Pleased the ears of Krishna, the Holder of the Disc.  
 The dark lord, himself a master seducer,  
 Looked at Manikya with a broad smile on his face.  
 In a voice as penetrating as that of the cuckoo  
 Or the rumbling thunder,  
 Or the sound issuing from gods or temple interiors,  
 When an earnest word appears to have been spoken in jest,  
 He said, “You say that you have brought these for us.  
 But what if you do not give when we order ?  
 You have surely tempted us.  
 Would you really give all those curd, milk and cheese to us ?  
 Having tempted us, are you really serious ?”

The seductress sharp at bargaining, countered :  
 “Why do you only talk ?  
 You will know, once you place your order for my goods,  
 All I have of course is yours.

Offer me a price for these wholesale  
And then feel free to take as much as you want."  
Thus wit met wit,  
The Holder of the Disc replied without getting down from his horse

Everything we have mastered, running after cows.  
Now people say, we are of the cowherd caste.  
We won the whole land by the strength of our arms.  
All belong to our kingdom, none an outsider.  
We found the Blue Mountain very convenient.  
Having built our place, we now live there.  
Numerous servants attend upon us,  
Each receives as wages, whatever he desires.  
Many of our own people do not care to know who we really are.  
We are uncomfortable staying at one place.  
Therefore we keep on moving from place to place.  
All the fourteen forts are ours.  
Anyone who challenges us, we kill.  
No fighter can match us.  
Sons of a warrior family, we are horsemen.  
We are now on our way to the Karnata kingdom  
To fight the King Kalabara Kesari of the Kanchi-Kaveri region.  
Large armies are following us.  
We two horsemen brothers leading them have to move quickly.  
By halting here we are getting late;  
Please hurry up, Manikya, give us milk and curd."

Manikya, extremely grateful for these words,  
Touched her basket and enquired.  
"How do I serve the food, where are the plates ?  
Thus the jest continued between the Dark Horseman and Manikya.  
Rohini's son, though present, was not able to grasp  
The trend of those exchanges.  
Manikya continued: "Tell me, O lord !  
Wherewith will you eat and who among you has priority ?"

The elder warrior replied:  
"Don't worry, we can eat from any vessel available.  
We, horsemen, are used to sitting on our horses and fighting :  
Eating even plain *roti* and water,

We eat whatever we get, clean or unclean.  
Do not hesitate; just hand over whatever you have."

"But please tell me, who do I serve the food first?"  
Asked Manikya.

In reply the elder warrior said:  
"Let my brother the black warrior be served first.  
And I after him."

To this the black one said:  
"How is that possible ?  
Being younger, how can I eat ahead of my elder brother ?"

"You eat," said one,  
"But only after you," said the other.  
And the argument dragged on and on.  
On their right stood Manikya with her basket,  
Her increasingly glowing beauty  
Enough to make billions of love-gods desire her.

The riders removing their left foot from the stirrup,  
Slung it over on the other side,  
Straddling the horses sideways; the right foot still in stirrup.  
Then shifting the spear from the right to the left hand,  
Held the rein and the whip under the arm-pit,  
Reaching up to the black warrior, Manikya said :  
"Here, take this and eat !"  
Unable to disobey the orders of the elder brother  
He extended his hand for the curd.  
Manikya happily went on offering all of her food,  
Milk, curd and cheese.  
The black warrior making certain  
Enough was left for the white one  
Began eating with relish.  
Manikya fixed her adoring gaze  
On the happy face, the focus of her meditation.  
Her rapturous body shivered uncontrollably.  
A portion of the curd spilled from her outstretched hand.  
Manikya grasped at the right foot of the lord.  
Placing it on her heaving water-pot-shaped bosom  
She hugged it in tight embrace without shame.  
The touch of the lotus-foot, tender and sweet, as from heaven  
made her greedy.

Appreciating her passionate longing  
 Jagannath, the lord of the universe,  
 Knowing everyone inside out,  
 Manifested himself in that foot as Manikya's man.  
 And with soft and quivering touches of the foot  
 Which were really his tender smile and gracious kiss  
 Conveyed his own love for her to Manikya.  
 Manikya felt fulfilled;  
 When she looked at his beatific face,  
 Her whole being was awash in joy.  
 Praise be to Manikya for the merit she had earned,  
 For which she was embraced by the Lord's foot.  
 Sages meditating for years  
 Are unable to have a glimpse  
 And yet, Manikya meditating on those feet, for many many births  
 Had them in her lap in a deep embrace.  
 The Lord always succumbing to ardent devotion  
 Had his stomach full eating the curd of total surrender :  
 That is why Purshottam Das  
 Salutes the feet of cowherdess Manikya without reservation.

Then, Jagannath the Horseman,  
 Pointing towards Balabhadra, the other warrior,  
 Said smiling: "My stomach is full.  
 Now feed the elder horseman.  
 We seem never to have enough when offered without devotion.  
 But, a little given with devotion fills us,  
 And contented, we remain the giver's captive.  
 I am really content.  
 Now take your curd to the elder lord".  
 Happy to hear this  
 Manikya gave all that she still had in the basket to the elder.  
 Manikya kept on serving;  
 Balarama, the wielder of the plough,  
 Went on eating.  
 Whatever desires Manikya still had  
 Were now satisfied at the sight of that lotus-face.  
 The elder horseman ate all the milk, curd, and ghee,  
 Sitting on the back of his horse.  
 Finding her pots had enough still  
 Even after feeding the two horsemen,  
 Manikya was very happy.  
 Two feudal servitors,  
 Incarnations of Uddhaba and Akrura,

Poured water into the hands of the two brothers.  
 After washing their hands and lotus face.  
 The two brothers began twirling the whiskers,  
 Also known as the hair of warriors,  
 Betokening their contentment.  
 They belched, looking at Manikya's face;  
 At the instant, the keeper of the horses Bisuni  
 And the servants Uddhaba and Akrura  
 Offered betel,  
 The special betel preparation without lime, catchew and tobacco,  
 But with other ingredients laced with camphor.

From *Kanchi Kaveri*, 17th century

Tr. by Rajendra Prasad Das

### Three Poems

#### RASANANDA

RASANANDA (Rasānanda, 17th century) was known as Rasananda Nabaghana Chanda. There is a blend of the Utkaliya Vaishnavism and the Goudiya Vaishnavism in his writing. He equates the human body with the whole universe and describes it as a temple, which is the abode of God. According to him, God's grace can be attained by *jnana* or knowledge and *sadhana* or penance. along with these, he also sang the glory of saguna bhakti and described the *lila* or divine sport of Radha and Krishna.

#### 1

#### Constantly Remembering You

Constantly recalling your everyday activities  
 and missing you  
 makes me lean.  
 He does not place her on a bed  
 but alights on her glance.  
 My heart breaks, thinking of this.  
 Oh ! why didn't I lose my life ?  
 I can no longer bear it,  
 though I have turned my body into stone.  
 O friend, tell me : how shall I live  
 when I am stung by the god of love ?

I see the beloved's face and  
his soft and smiling words.  
Is it fair  
to suffer separation at the peak of youth ?  
Says Rasananda to the white-toothed Radha :  
Dispel doubts from your mind.  
For I dreamt last night  
that your beloved would come !

*Ahamish Paduthal Manre*, 17th century

Tr. by Sachidananda Mohanty and  
Smita Mohanty

2

The Flag Fluttering in the Neelachakra

The flag is fluttering in the *Neelachakra*<sup>1</sup>  
Repeat the name of God—O Mind the soul.  
The triveni<sup>2</sup> flows upstream from the north.  
In the midst of Ganga and Yamuna.  
Having harnessed the plough, he appears.  
You shall be dazed by the sight :  
The lily blooms without water and mud,  
emitting a divine fragrance.  
Like a mound of gold  
lies the unseen deity before the eye.  
The temple rests on the stable shore  
Only the waves are unstable.  
The offering is made without a priest.  
The bells resound in the sky.  
None can take a dip  
in the flow of Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati.  
Says Rasananda :  
My senses are getting lost.

*Neelchakre Uduchi Bana*, 17th century

Tr. by Sachidananda Mohanty and  
Smita Mohanty

1. The wheel placed on the top of the Jagannath temple in Puri.
2. The holy confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati. Triveni flowing upstream refers to the raising of the Kundalini or the serpent power in the Indian spiritual tradition, from the lowest level to the uppermost, the abode of Brahman.

## 3

## Many Many Aeons

After worshipping for many aeons  
at long last, I've found you,  
O dear Krishna !

I am not a milkmaid of yours;  
yet you entice me with your flute,  
Bolting the door of my heart  
I shall make love, clasping  
you in my womb.  
You flirt, bumble-bee !  
You went and hid in the field of the lotus !  
I shall pluck the flowers  
and put them into a basket.  
If you are a fish, then I shall be  
a crow on the river !  
If you are soaring high, then  
I shall draw you  
with the string of love.  
Says Rasananda Nabaghanachanda :  
Have you lost your senses ?  
If you are a dove, then I, as a vulture,  
shall always be after you.

*Koti Koti Yuga*, 17th century

*Tr.* by Sachidananda Mohanty and  
Smita Mohanty

## Six Poems

## SALABEGA

SALABEGA (Sālabeḡa, 1607-1708) was born to a Muslim father named Lalabeg who worked as an officer under the Muslim king of Orissa and a widow Brahmin mother. When Salabega grew up, he became a great devotee of Lord Jagannath. As he had Muslim parentage, he was never allowed to enter the temple of Lord Jagannath. So in his writings he primarily sang the glory of the Lord and expressed sorrow for his cursed life; in simple language and lucid style. His poetry has been very popular among the Oriyas. His songs are sung by the common people as well as by the devotees even today.

1

O Jagannatha!

O Jagannatha, I ask nothing of you,  
It's not wealth or men that I ask for,  
I ask only for a handful of Sharadhabali.<sup>1</sup>

These eyes do not crave the sight of others.  
It's only you I seek.  
I have no desire to hear others.  
My only desire is to sing your glory.  
My tongue does not wish to spend  
days and nights singing folk songs.  
O dear Jagannath, it's only your name  
that we repeat.

My nose feels no fragrance but yours.  
and other than that, your garlands and *tulsi*,  
flowers, sandalwood and camphor.  
Let the fingers, telling beads, repeat  
the name of Hari and Krishna.  
Born as a Muslim, Salabega says :  
Let me attain my end in your abode.

*Jagannath He*, 17th -18th century

Tr. by Sachidananda Mohanty and  
Smita Mohanty

2

Why Have You Come, O Soul ?

Why have you come, O soul ? To take what ?  
You have come nude, and you'll go back alone.  
While the floodgates are open, you try to dam the flow.  
Though you lose your own life, you grieve over others.

The one you married after giving sarees and bangles  
eats you up in the guise of Death.  
In this earthen cage, you grow the golden parrot.  
The love Lord has caused an enticement.  
Taking refuge at his lotus feet, Salabega says :  
There's no other way out apart from Krishna.

*Kahinki Asichu man*, 16th-18th century

Tr. by Sachidananda Mohanty and  
Smita Mohanty

1. A place on the seashore at Puri whose sand is considered sacred to the devotees.



## 3

## I Saw Him Today

Dearest, I saw today,  
 under the *kadamba* tree,  
 the lord of the gods.  
 After a quick glance at him  
 I blushed.  
 His radiance was like a new cloud.  
 I lost my senses and my poise.  
 Not to see him for a moment  
 means forfeiting my life.  
 I am being consumed by the love-god's fire.  
 On his head, there is a peacock's feather,  
 and he wears long plaited hair.  
 The sight of him inevitably turns  
 bands of chaste women  
 into courtesans.  
 Seeing him,  
 my eyes dance day and night.  
 How then shall I live ? asks Salabega.

*Dekhili Ajago*, 17th-18th century

Tr. by Sachidananda Mohanty and  
 Smita Mohanty

## 4

## O Dear Friend

O dear friend ! How splendid Gopinath looks!  
 Golden thread across shoulder, *chita*<sup>1</sup> on the forehead.  
 Around the neck, double-layers of pearl, O dear one !  
 Pendants on the ears, garland of *tulsi* around the neck,  
 Peacock feathers on the forehead, O dear one.  
 In my haste, I turned him down  
 as a dark man.

But now, the heart is anxious, O dear friend.  
 Standing in *tribhanga* pose, flute in hand.

1. Mark made with sandalwood paste on the forehead of devotees.

Who knows the power of lightning, O dear one ?  
Says Salabega, I am an ignoble Muslim by birth  
But I pray, O dear one,  
at the feet of Lord Krishna !

*Ki Ago Mit*, 17th-18th century

Tr. by Sachidanand Mohanty and  
Smita Mohanty

5

O Sakhi, the Flute Plays in the Grove

O friend, tell me  
who plays the flute  
in the grove ?  
The bare trees bloom  
at the sound of his flute.  
The air stands still.  
Stones turn into water.  
The Yamuna flows upstream  
and the fish seek the shore.  
As the bell tinkles slowly,  
freeing us from shame,  
there's no time left to wear clothes.  
Strange ! the Rishi loses his poise  
and succumbs to love.  
The deer chases the tiger.  
Says Salabega: I am Muslim by birth  
But my heart is  
at the feet of Radhakrishna.

*Sakhi, Kunjbana Bansī*, 17th-18th century

Tr. by Sachidanand Mohanty  
and Smita Mohanty

6

You Live Only for the Bhakta

Apart from the *bhakta*,  
you have no life.  
*Shankha* and *Chakra*<sup>1</sup> —your emblems—

1. The conch and the wheel, used as emblems of Krishna.

are meant only for the *bhaktas*.  
 The *bhakta* is your parent,  
 The *bhakta* your friend.  
 You are called *Kripasindhu*<sup>1</sup>  
 because of your concern for the *bhaktas*.  
 Like the calf chasing the cow for milk,  
 You run after the *bhakta*.  
 My father a Moghal, my mother a Brahmin,  
 I am a Hindu, shunned by all.  
 Says Salabega:  
 I am an ignoble Muslim by birth.  
 I have no refuge  
 Other than the feet of Krishna.

*Eka To Bhakt Jeeban*, 17th-18th century

Tr. by Sachidananda Mohanty  
 and Smita Mohanty

## Selections

### Upendra Bhanja

UPENDRA BHANJA (Upendra Bhañja, c. 1670-1740) is considered one of the greatest poets of medieval Orissa. He was born in the royal family of Ghumsar, in the district of Ganjam, in southern Orissa, but due to palace-intrigues left his kingdom and settled in the adjoining Nayagarh. A great scholar, highly imaginative, he excelled in the use of language and incorporated innumerable musical structures in his poetry. He wrote a large number of Kavyas including a famous retelling of Ramayana in verse, entitled *Vaidehisha Vilas* (*Vaidehisa Vilās*) and innumerable, extremely popular songs, mostly on love. His other works are *Labanyabati*, which narrates the passionate romance of Prince Chandra Bhanu of Karnataka and Princess Labanyabati of Simhala; *Premasudhanidhi*, *Subhadra Parinaya*, etc.

Thirteen passages selected from his writings are given below :

#### 1

### On Seeing the Clouds

This is a description of the rainy season and of Labanyabati: her sorrow at separation from her lover.

1. Kripasindhu — Ocean of Compassion, another name for Krishna

When the new clouds gathered in the sky and the white swans flew in a line, the friends of the lady remembered Lord Mahadev. They wondered how they could save the lady who walked as gracefully as an elephant. If they could live in emotion despite the rains, the glory would remain forever. The days were short and it was a bad time because the lover was away. The rains people welcome, but for lovers and ladies in love, it is as poisonous as a snake. The rains extinguish the fire on the mountains, they rescue the earth from the scorching heat of the sun, but the fire of separation that burns in human hearts is never extinguished with water. It is seen as it were, like lightning in the heart of dark clouds. The lady is afraid; she sleeps on earth; her eyes are full of tears; she breathes heavily and her life's breath may go out any time : the separation has made her so frail ! please be careful, the storm may blow her away! When the cuckoo sings and the lover is away, she feels lost; it is as if she is struck by thunder, and she prays to Agasti, the great rishi, to save her. Now when the clouds are so deep and dark, and the thunders descend so frighteningly, Oh how can she live in separation—so delicate is she ! Please stop her ears when the thunders play—her breasts which look like mountains invite thunder and rain. Oh! please take her inside the house to safety.

Now in the excitement of amorous creatures in the rains the snails make noise and the cuckoos are quite. The lady should now worship Parvati, the consort of Lord Shiva, and keep jackals, the Lord's creatures, so that the jackals, may eat the snails and her fire of separation is lessened. Look how the peacocks spread their fans and dance : Oh the sight will kill the lady in love ! What do the peacocks gain if they kill the lady who is not to be killed? Call the people, please; put snares; kill the birds and offer their fans to gods who will lessen her fire of separation.

Now the *dahuka* calls its mate, now the bees come and make love to flowers : these the lady cannot tolerate. Let us kill the *dahuka*, and let us uproot the flowers. As the swans fly to Manasarovar for their mates, the lady feels restless. Oh, how can she live without her mate ! Let us catch swans and pluck their wings so that they cannot fly and will stay with her till her husband returns.

The rains fall and the spray touches her. But how can she tolerate the touch of water when her golden body cannot tolerate even the cool touch of sandal paste !

O women, don't bring her out, stop all the holes of the house with water-reeds, and let not even a spray of water touch her! Now the frogs call continuously and the call takes away her senses again and again ! It's a pity the thunder does not fall on them ! It's a pity there are no snakes to eat the frogs as the divine bird Garuda has eaten all the snakes ! The clouds boom and crouch like elephants, it's strange there are no lions to scare away the clouds!

As the clouds gather, the rains fall, and lightning flashes like a banner, she feels lonely and calls for her mate. Oh, why didn't Lord Krishna kill the rains when he fought against Indra ! As the hailstones fall, she is startled, and as the rains torture her, her body flowers like *kadamba* flower in desire and excitement.

The tears flow from her lotus eyes like the flow of raisin; her cheeks are muddy like the muddy earth; she is quiet like the cuckoo; the thoughts cover her like darkness and the flower-arrows of the love-god pierce her heart like the tall-stemmed *malati* flower. Her beauty is hidden like the sun's rays; her wisdom is covered as the mountains are covered by the clouds, and the rains like an axe destroy her *sal*/tree-like patience. How can we lessen her fire of separation—can a king's command contain a river in flood ?

From *Labanyabati*, Canto 22, 17th-18th century

Tr. by J.M. Mohanty

## 2

### Bridal Night

The following is a description of the moonlit bridal night :

Now the night which brings pleasure to all has come. In the voice of the cuckoo, it declares that the love-god is favourable, and it calls all young men and women to unite. Now the moon has risen and the silvery light fills all around. It looks as if the dark body of the night is now covered with a white sandal paste, or as if the milk-white sea mixes with the blue waters of Yamuna, or as if to cool the white-heat of the sun, the Supreme God has now filled the earth with camphor-dust, or as if Lord Shiva who carries the moon on his head has now washed the earth-house with white moonlight. The moon like a snare of the love-god now catches the young hearts, and they who thought of drowning in water out of love-agony are now afraid, since the moon who was born of water would also torture them there !..The clever women attendants now come to the princess, and as the excitement of moonlight deepens, they prepare her for the bridal bed. They ask the lady whether they should arrange her hair in a knot or leave it like a tail. They let hang a small diamond from her nose so that it would dance when she is in love-action. They put a gold-necklace round her neck but assume that from now onwards her husband would be like a necklace to her. As they slowly decorate her breasts with *kasturi* they are afraid that her husband might not tolerate the weight of the lady. As they put on black paints in her eyes, they wonder how many young hearts would tolerate her piercing look ♀ . . . Now the decoration is done. The women show her face in a mirror and praise her beauty. They let her stand in all her wonderful glory, like a golden statue of

the love-god! They put a precious, transparent cloth round her youthful body; but her youth is like an overflowing river and how can a piece of frail cloth like a bank of sand contain her!

From *Labanyaka*, canto 32, 17th-18th century

Tr. by J.M. Mohanty

3

Sweet Spring

The passage given below describes the pleasures Labanyabati and her friends had in the garden in the spring season.

At this time Pravamanjula informed the beautiful damsel how the sweet spring season has entered the world. "Haven't you heard, O young lady", she said, "how the cuckoo sings again and again in the dark night? The mild breeze has started blowing with the properties stolen from the top of Malaya hills. The bumble-bee has warned the jasmine flower that it would steal its fragrance. The lotus looks beautiful with new filaments and pollen-tubes. Plenty of flowers have bloomed to decorate the hairs of young ladies. *Malli*, *Madhabi* and *Makarand* are now like married women. They hang from the ear-lobes of our friends. The snow-time is over. See the white smile on the lotus face. The bees move out everywhere. The god of love now threatens the lover with his bow of flowers. Krishna's swinging game is over. The body sweats. It is pleasant when it is smeared with sandal paste and camphor, and fanned. O my dear clever woman, don't you know this? Let us now move. Let us have now new happiness and comfort."

The ladies-in-waiting cleared the path. They devised ways how not to hurt her feet as delicate as lotus and as spotless. They blended cheese with sandal paste and sprayed it; mixed the petals of young *sebati* flower with camphor-powder and scattered them. They arranged fans with reeds; collected betel-boxes; and the minister's daughter helped the paramour of the world to rise. She is the greatest beauty, the chief among all the princesses, they thought, and raised a white lotus leaf over her head like a royal umbrella and moved a fly-whisk. Some clever lady played on the *veena*, and the music seemed to say "Look, as the princess walks along the road, it is like the god of love moving in a chariot fulfilling the desires of the road. The face and the forehead are like the moon-mirror, the long tresses of hair like a fly-whisk, the wavy doe-like eyes are like the horses moving playfully, the restless twin breasts are like the pitcher and the wheel, and the cloth around the waist where a bell jingles is like a fluttering banner."

Thus scattering charm around, the young ladies with plump breasts entered the garden. They roamed, played, plucked flowers and were happy. Then they started having dialogues with double meaning, and the cuckoos who

heard them fell silent in expectation. Said one, there is a *sunani* flower here, a fine woman; and a restless male goes everywhere touching every one. Then a shy girl retorted, O, you are so conscientious, why can't you name a drunken bee? Then said another, look there is *nageswara* flower, I like to pluck it and to pluck its soft, green leaves (*supama*). The other retorted, how clever you are; you go for both, *nageswara* (king of snakes) and *supama* (garuda). Go, ride a *nageswara*, the divine elephant, and have the divine pleasure. Oh, oh, said one to the other, O friend, consider me kindly. By god's grace the *nageswara*, the lover, is yours. Oh no, retorted the other, I don't get my life's partner, the *badhuli* flower, it is only a bush of thorns, the sword of boar, that I get.

From *Labanyabati*, canto 5, 17th-18th century

Tr. by J.M. Mohanty

4

### She Shines like Bibhusana Flower

The following passage from *Vaidehisha Vilas* describes the wedding of Sita.

She who shines like *bibhusana* flower, decorate her specially and bring her. Let her worship Ganesha, step over obstructions, and let her welcome Rama and make him happy. So said Sage Vishwamitra to King Janaka, and it was like the cool smear of sandal paste on Rama, the descendent of Ragha. Her name is Sita, and she is *Sita*, thought he—sweetness, holiness and a furrow. Her beauty is sweetness unparalleled; she is a branch of divine Ganga, pure and holy; and she furrows the heart and sows the seeds of affection. As he thought so, King Janaka agreed, and all Sita's friends heard it.

The lady-dressers were called. They sat down and dressed up Sita, and made her happy. Some held a mirror up to the red-lipped lady which became beautiful by taking up the reflection. Some untied her hair, and as it fell down across her back; it appeared as if the glow of blue diamonds moved from top to bottom. They massaged the hair softly with oil and combed with ivory combs. As they moved the comb up and down, it appeared as if the white lotuses were floating in the waves of dark-blue Yamuna. Then, carefully, they tied up the loose hair into a bun. It appeared as if the minds, like fishes, got held up in that emerald basket of a bun.

They put a red vermilion line at her hair-parting and along with it an incomparable ruby as crown-jewel, which they fastened to the dark bun with a red silk thread. It appeared the red sun has now strangled the dark Ráhu which vomits nectar in the form of the *bakul* garland of the bun. They decorated Śita's head with golden *kiapatri* and *muktajali* ornaments and it appeared the god of love has used the ornaments as traps in the dark *tamala* forest of Sita's hair to catch the deer of patience and to kiss it with the arrow of *jharakathi* fastened to her curved head-dresses.

They put garlands of multi-coloured flowers around her head, which exceeded the beauty of the rainbow in the sky. As they put garlands of white *chandrajhumpi* and beaded *jhilimili* at the end of her dark curled hair, it was as if both the moon and the Ursa Major had risen together at the end of the night to gladden the hearts of all. They put jasmine buds in her earlobes, and it appeared the thunder could not tolerate the beauty and burnt in the fire of sorrow. Then they put flower-like ornaments in the ears to show that the bud blossoms into flower. Then they put *baliguna* over it to suggest that one worshipped this lady. Then they put *bandia* wheel below the ears which wheeled through the meditations of the yogis and drowned their minds in the whirlwind of water.

The friends put the mark of golden musk and vermilion on Sita's forehead. It had the power to charm the world in a moment (*tila*), and hence was called *tilaka*. On looking at the diamond studded ornaments on both the ears of Sita, one wonders if they are the divine-teachers, Brihaspati and Shukra, who had come to praise Sita's *tilaka*, but instead have become mute in admiration and remained hanging as her ear-ornaments. The friends fixed red *guna* of diamond and white *notha* of pearl in her nostrils, and the nostrils looked beautiful. One wonders if they are Ardra and Rohini, one red and the other white, the two wives of the moon, who have turned unfaithful because the moon has a stain and have now come to stay in Sita's stainless face.

The god of love is a dear friend, some said, because the banner of his chariot carries the sign of *makara*, and let us paint, they said, the same sign on Sita's body because she is the love-god's chariot of dear love. Who was to do that, they quarrelled, when a good friend took a brush and painted a sign of female *makara* on Sita's cheek. Another friend took a little musk and put a dot on her chin. It seemed as if a bee strayed from its group and got fixed there: so silent and dumb. Then they put collyrium in her eyes which seemed like an angling hook being put in a small river. Again on seeing the tail of collyrium one wonders if it is not a pride-biting black snake that slips from the box of an eye to the hole of an ear. Or are the tails like two comets on both the sides of the princess-like eyes to bring disaster in the hearts of the youth?

Then the friends put a necklace of rubies round her neck. It appears as if a dove that mistook the rubies as particles of rice and came to eat them, has now got trapped there. Or is the neck a conch coloured so lavishly with colourful beads? Then they painted her twin breasts with musk, and as the pictures of creepers were drawn the breasts appeared like two hillocks. Then they covered them with blue bodices with golden frill, and put a garland of diamond over them. What wonderful beauty one wonders. It appears as if the twin hills, Vindhya and Mandara, are now covered with blue clouds and while lightning plays in the blueness, white cranes fly in lines ....



## 5

## A Letter in Supplication

The following extract from *Prema Sudhanidhi* is in the form of a love letter from the young prince to his lady.

A clear, transparent moon reigns in the autumn sky. It looks as if a vain man has decorated himself with mirrors. It pained the prince, and he sat down to write a letter in supplication. Let my mind be at the lotus feet of Sita's Lord Rama, he mused, and let this be a letter to that princess adept at love-games. Now I die thinking of her, like a poor man who has lost a gem.

You are my pair of spectacles, he said and it is lost. I can't see if there is any other remedy. I am groping like a man newly gone blind, and my agony, O dear lady, increases every moment. But take this, even though far away, you are still with me. Like the moon and the lotus, how far they are, and yet how close, how bound in love. No matter whatever the distance be, one always belongs to the other.

O young lady, the leaves may fly off anywhere. But can't they be known by the name of the tree ? O my friend, I am like that to you, known everywhere as a slave of the beautiful damsel. You are like a mirage wherever I look. You never come to me, as a reflection in a mirror never comes close. Why are you so playful ? Have I done any sin that I don't know of ?

As the sun's light never leaves the poles, my mind never leaves your plump breasts. I am like the bull that depends on Lord Shiva and yet eats grass. My pain will never end. Your love, like a shaft of arrow, strikes me, and melts me, like a hailstorm. My mind is like a piece of iron, O lady, and the magnet of your kiss has taken it away from me.

My body burns in separation, like putting water in a burnt-out shell, and all cool comforts like sandal-paste burn me like hot iron. Nothing avails in separation, O Lady, the bed of green leaves is meaningless; all that is only for show, like Mars in the system of planets. My life is like a tree on the bank of a rising river. I have doubts how I should escape. I have *Rahu's* fate, O dear, my head will be severed after I drink nectar. Like the bird *chakora's* hopes for the moon, and swallow's for the rains, I have many *hopes* for you. Fate like a master-magician showed me the golden beauty and stole her away.

You have become like an object in a dream, O my beloved, so adept at amours. The circle of season like a night covers me. I don't know where the rains were to separate us so. The woman who loves has a heart like a coconut, hard outside, soft within. I knew that when we embraced so lovingly. Now it is changed, separation makes it so. You have not sent me any letter so far. Even when a messenger is sent, you do not entertain it. O my friend, has your heart now become like a ripe mango, open to all ? I have been like a

shadow to you. I have followed you like a slave. Our love is like water mixed with milk. Now like the *kadamba* flower I endure the danger of separation.

When should I spend a night with you: I always recite it like a *mantra*. I now repent, like a woman repenting after a quarrel. O my lady, you are as virtuous as Saraswati. I submit myself. I can't write any more. Please have pity on me. Permit me to go to you.

From *Prema Sudhanidhi*, 17th-18th century

Tr. by J.M. Mohanty

## 6

### O My Dear Lady !

The following songs (6-13) are about the beauty of women and about love.

O dear lady, I have turned my heart to stone in anguish,  
 Who does not go to Yamuna ?  
 Who does not look at Shyamabandhu Krishna ?  
 But O my burnt destiny !  
 I am singled out as a coquette  
 For all time to come.  
 Whom has Krishna, the cynosure of Braja, not loved ?  
 Who does not know this ?  
 But everybody, day and night, slanders me.  
 Tell me, how can I live ?  
 How can I keep my patience ?  
 Whom has he not slighted at Braja,  
 That Banamali ?  
 But enemies clap in glee  
 And link my name with Shyamabandhu.  
 O dear !  
 My heart burns in pain  
 At this unnecessary slander.  
 This is my condition now :  
 The enemies laugh at me day and night,  
 I sit and worry  
 And the night passes,  
 I don't sleep  
 O my doe-eyed friend,  
 Leave me out  
 Don't hope for me any more.  
 Thus says Upendra Bhanja in song,

The friends of Radha saw her pain  
 And said , O young woman,  
 Don't take the slanders of enemies as facts;  
 O sweet-voiced one,  
 Don't worry about the intolerant.

*Are Priya Sahi*, 17th-18th century

Tr. by J.M. Mohanty

7

Shrimati and Shripati

Shrimati and Shripati made love to each other at Brindaban,  
 Under the beautiful trees of Brindaban  
 The young man who fulfills all wishes  
 And the gem of a woman  
 Had their love-dalliance in great excitement.  
 In ivory-white bed  
 In the mire of white sandal-paste  
 The woman with the face of a white swan  
 And he who holds the *Saranga* bow  
 Made love to each other in great abandon.

In the land of lotus  
 In the midst of lotuses  
 The lotus-faced woman  
 And he who sits on a lotus  
 Joined each other in immense pleasure.

Like elephant on lion  
 The doe-eyed woman made love to her mate  
 Destroyed the enmity of the love-god, Shiva's enemy,  
 And in love-dalliance  
 Both longed to serve Shiva.

*Shrimati Shripati Brindabane*, 17th-18th century

Tr. by J.M. Mohanty

8

New for Some Time

All my love  
 So new in the beginning :  
 Who can count that in words;

But the whole of it  
If you understand  
Will be like a broken glass, O friend,  
Shyamabandhu's love is like that  
Once broken it never can be joined.

He kept water in a pot of hope  
And dashed it against the stone of disappointment,  
How could he do this ?  
What flaws he found in me ?  
We suffer and tolerate, so long we live, O friend.

He loved me like a mango-tree  
And thought me wrong, O dear.

How often he came in the beginning !  
How many times he came to my house !  
And everywhere the stamp of his lotus feet—  
In rooms, in courtyard<sup>s</sup> on doorsteps, everywhere,  
The banner, the thunder, the pot, the umbrella, the wheel—  
all signs, O dear,  
Now like dreams to me.

It is my destiny to remember and suffer.  
When flaws did he find in me so as to stay with that woman?  
Oh, that clever woman,  
Who could hypnotize him  
And break up the ties so !  
Oh, I can't leave him even if he leaves me !  
Thus, says Upendra, with his heart at the feet of Krishna.

*Nua Nua Dinakete*, 17th-18th century

Tr. by J.M. Mohanty

୨

Where did he Stay ?

Oh, without him, my friend,  
The days and nights have become like a million ages.  
Where did he stay ?  
Why didn't he come ?  
The fire of love burns me so.

Tell me, which woman won him over,  
 By which *mantra*.  
 Is the God of love no more ?  
 Is he dead in that land ?

The clothes weigh heavily  
 So for all my ornaments  
 See, see my friend, this hot wind  
 Like the weapon of love  
 Takes my life away.

At this time of spring  
 How I long to be with him  
 And spend my days and nights in love !  
 Oh, what happiness is lost, my friend,  
 All lost !

I know I will die  
 And he will be called a murderer  
 Ah, my ornaments and flowers  
 All useless !  
 Says Upendra in sorrow.

*Kanhi Se Rahite*, 17th-18th century

Tr. by J.M. Mohanty

10

Whose Woman ?

The woman with red lips  
 Seized my heart,  
 Whose woman is she,  
 So newly out in the street,  
 Her slow gait puts the gait of the elephant to shame.  
 Her beauty shines  
 Like a polished diamond.  
 Can a fairy be equal to her,  
 To a picture so sweet and lovely ?  
 Her smile glitters  
 With the fragrance of pollen-dust,  
 And in the twinkling of an eye :  
 How I long to follow her !  
 The eyes dance in playfulness

Does she aim a spear ?  
 Oh, the delicate one pierced my heart !  
 How I long to be with her  
 Tell her,  
 How I long to be her slave !  
 Says Upendra,  
 No, no chance to get at her,  
 I am lost,  
 The god of love, Shiva's enemy  
 Tortures me.

*Ramani Se Kahara*, 17th-18th century

*Tr.* by J.M. Mohanty

11

O Lazy Beauty !

O my lazy beauty !  
 It was the end of a moonlit night,  
 I returned from afar,  
 And alone with the lady,  
 I told her all my sorrows,  
 How she kept hidden within herself  
 All her wondrous beauty  
 And did not want me much !  
 Her tresses of hair were open.  
 She had no attendant,  
 Her clothes had slipped to her waist  
 And she glanced about wildly,  
 I saw her for a moment;  
 I was stunned.  
 She came and embraced me  
 Caressed my chin,  
 And again she kept away,  
 As if hurt.  
 Says Upendra Bhanja, the hero,  
 Is she going to be my bed-mate ?  
 The mind gets excited at the thought  
 The night was ending.

*Are Madalasa*, 17th-18th century

*Tr.* by J.M. Mohanty

## 12

## O Heavy-haired One !

O heavy-haired one !  
 What a picture do you make  
 When you return from love-making !  
 I can't hold it with my eyes,  
 Attuned to my home.

The paintings on your breasts are blurred  
 You walk unsteadily, half-asleep,  
 The tight knot of your cloth is loose  
 And you try to pull it up so,  
 Your golden body shines with sweat.  
 Your sandal paste shows in patches,  
 The hairs are loose,  
 Streaming below the waist.  
 What a picture !  
 Says Upendra  
 And repeats it again and again.

*Ghanakeshi*, 17th-18th century

Tr. by J.M. Mohanty

## 13

## The Jewel of a Woman

O my jewel of a woman !  
 How youth sharpens your body  
 And gathers so many beauties around.

The clouds come together in a bun  
 Like a deluge to conscience,  
 And pride stays in your nose  
 Teaching eye-brows how to play  
 Like a snake playing.

As collyrium is added to the eyes  
 They look side-ways restless like a wag-tail,  
 And they pull bumble-bees who come for honey  
 As if by a rope.

The face is polished like a mirror  
And red lips smile again and again  
Glittering like the young sun.

The breasts rise slowly  
Like constructing a golden palace,  
Is it the coronation, one wonders,  
Of him who carries the bow of flowers?

The thigh mould  
Soft, golden,  
And Rambha's pride is humbled.

Thus says Upendra Bhanja,  
How young men worry about her,  
This figure of love and beauty  
Immeasurable.

*Ramamaniki*, 17th-18th century

Tr. by J.M. Mohanty

## Five Poems

### BANAMALI

BANAMALI (Banamāli, 18th century) was born at Puri, and was originally known as Banamali Pattanayak. A Vaishnavite, he died at Vrindaban in 1790. Of the few *kavyas* he wrote, one was *Suchitra Ramayana* and another *Mathura Lila*. He is most famous as a composer of innumerable lyrics mostly dealing with Radha-Krishna Leela, as well as with Lord Jagannath. His songs are sung all over Orissa.

### 1

O Shyama !

Suddenly my eyes fell on Shyama  
And my wisdom, conscience, drowned.  
What charm and beauty !  
What figure like a new cloud !  
The mind longed for him and his love.  
Peacock feather as a diadem,  
Sly and clever;  
What sculptor carved that picture of grace and beauty !



My life, my youth  
 My caste, patience, pride  
 All fell prostrate before his feet.  
 Fire on home, husband,  
 Fire on friends, relatives,  
 It uprooted my conjugal faithfulness.  
 All my virtues and fears  
 Of seniors and guardians,  
 The sweet notes of his flute glossed over;  
 His thin waist and dancing body,  
 And quizzical sidelong glances,  
 Pierced my heart like the tip of an arrow.  
 My mind was merged in that  
 Great grace and beauty.  
 In that delightful abode  
 Of the love-god of Brindaban,

Thus says Banamali,  
 The love of Gopis rose like  
 A river in flood,  
 Immersed in that flavour,  
 Sweet and thick.

*Shyama Srirange*, 18th century

Tr. by J.M. Mohanty

## 2

### How Ashamed!

What a shame I felt today, O friend,  
 What a shame !  
 I quickly covered my body with clothes,  
 But lo ! he was already there,  
 The great philanderer.  
 I looked around,  
 The place was lonely,  
 And I went to the bathing place;  
 I took off my clothes and bodice  
 And rubbed saffron on my body,  
 The leaves of water could not hide  
 My round, proud breasts,  
 Can ever a great tree hide a lotus  
 However it may try ?

If I cover one side  
 The other side is exposed  
 I did not know how to hide them,  
 If I lower my face.  
 The proud breasts they are.  
 They push the face up.  
 Would I hide them in my long tresses of hair ?  
 No, they are tied in a knot.

Thus says Banamali,  
 O divine lady,  
 Go, and hide in water.

*Kilaja Paili*, 18th century

*Tr.* by J.M. Mohanty

.3

### I Become an Outcaste

I become an outcaste, O my friend,  
 By making Shyama's love my garland.  
 Let them say however ill they like  
 I do not grieve, never;  
 The black gold is my secret treasure,  
 I am sold to him as a slave, O friend.

Some say Radha is unchaste,  
 Some say Radha is mad,  
 Some praise me,  
 They say I am rich in love,  
 For whom all these, O friend,  
 Who takes these blames and praises ?

I do not balance profit and loss,  
 I am Krishna's slave on my own,  
 Find out, ask everybody,  
 I cannot taste my food without him.

How can I forget, O friend,  
 That new *tamala* grace,  
 The sweet movement of the new dancer,  
 The seductive boy who has a flute in hand ?

Thus says Banamali—

O, Radha, listen,  
Love secretly, move secretly,  
Unite with your lover secretly,  
Or else they will slander;  
They will sit on your reputation everywhere.

*Munta Kularu Heli Bahar*, 18th century

*Tr.* by J.M. Mohanty

4

O Friend !

O friend,  
I became like the tongs of a blacksmith,  
Sometimes in water.  
Sometimes in fire.  
Both are the same to me.  
She who loves is happy,  
I am most unhappy, my friend,  
My eyes become blind  
If I don't see him.

I tell you something more, my friend,  
This is the nature of sinful love,  
If you slander, my chest inflates,  
If you praise, I feel as if burnt.

I can't describe how I feel then,  
My mind gets stuck on him,  
A year becomes a moment when I see him,  
And a moment becomes an age if I don't.

Thus says Banamali—  
If you love  
There is no happiness,  
You pine and die, again and again,  
Like a snake catching a mole,  
You can't swallow, can't leave,  
And when you think of a gain,  
You lose.

*Ago Sahachari*, 18th century

*Tr.* by J.M. Mohanty

5

O My Friend !

O my friend !  
 In what a shame I drowned yesterday.  
 I didn't take you,  
 I missed every step,  
 Into what a mire of misjudgement I stumbled !  
 Shyama came in the guise of a woman,  
 And entered into my apartment,  
 And said, "Come, come, please,  
 I will redden your feet",  
 I heard his mild voice,  
 I lost my sense,  
 I put on a thin, old saree,  
 I asked him to wait,  
 I didn't cover my body.  
 Why should I fear ?  
 How could I know,  
 O tell me, my friend ?  
 He used many arts  
 And reddened my feet so gracefully,  
 And wrote his name  
 "Shyama....Shyama" below,  
 I was startled,  
 I was restless,  
 I wanted to go,  
 But he caught hold of my feet and never let me go;  
 The cunning lout, he left  
 The wearer of yellow clothes,  
  
 And thus says Banamali,  
 Who wants to be a bee  
 On the lotus-feet of that philanderer.

*Prana Sanginire*, 18th century

Tr. by J.M. Mohanty

## Selections

### BRAJANATHA BADAJENA

BRAJANATHA BADAJENA (Brajanāth Badajeña, 1739-1800) was a poet of the ornate style. He knew, besides Oriya, Prakrit, Sanskrit, Bengali, Telugu and Hindi. Among his works are *Kelikalanidhi*, *Ambika Vilasa* and *Chatura Vinoda*.

Two of his works are represented here by the excerpts given below : *Rajananka Chhala Ukti* (A Humble Petition to the King) and *Niti Vinoda* (The Tale of Niti Vinoda).

1

### A Humble Petition to the King

Meditating upon the feet of Siddha Baladeva, Brajanatha Badajena presents this petition to the Lord of Dhenkanal :

“O King, Shri Raja Mahindra Bahadur,  
 The jewel among all the great and heroic rulers,  
 The remover of all sorrows,  
 I, one of your officials,  
 Of a family that has served you for seven generations,  
 The great refuge that you are,  
 We had our share of joy and sorrow under you.  
 Presently, my lord,  
 You have bequeathed to me, the glory of a king,  
 But the ignorant say :  
 “For what fault does Badajena suffer so ?  
 Great masters bestow their station on their servants,  
 Did not Lord Vishnu once give up  
 His discus and conch  
 Giving them to his servant who he blessed with four arms ?

Now, listen,  
 How I have the wealth of a king :  
 The moment I take up a piece of chalk  
 I may credit to my account  
 Heaps of rice, money and gold.  
 Lord, you acquired six tuskers spending a huge treasure,  
 And I treasure a six cubit length of cloth.  
 Lord, you still look for a noble horse of the Indus breed up to your taste,  
 Likewise I seek daily a pinch of Indus salt for my palate.  
 Everyday you sit in great comfort in your drawing room.  
 And I often sit with great pleasure on the ground drawing up my knees.  
 When out in procession  
 You have leaf-shaped sunshades decorated with emblems of the  
 sun and the moon.  
 Similarly when sitting at home  
 The sun and the moon shine through the roof over my head.

Messengers, my lord, spread your fame around the world.  
 So am I known all over the world as the helpless one  
 You, my lord, have a bright aura,  
 Thanks to the strings of pearl adorning your neck;  
 I too have a glow rolling in pearl-white ash like a dog.  
 Many families are there to minister to your needs;  
 I have my food served with several vegetable families.  
 You are famed for your prowess with bows and arrows of bamboo.  
 I too am known through the noble deeds of my line.  
 You keep order in your realm by Tandi forbidding idle talk.  
 I have kept my house in order by covering the roof with Tandi reeds.  
 You, my lord, never extended your palms  
 In supplication before the rulers at Cuttack.  
 So are my hands innocent of any misdeed  
 Or conspiracy hatched in any royal court.  
 You have baskets of gold in your treasury;  
 I too have many baskets of bamboo in my store.  
 You see, all around your palace, heaps of copper coins.  
 And everyday, my lord, I see many mendicants  
 With copper-red matted locks in God's palace.  
 You are the master of kingdom of two hundred miles;  
 And through your magnificence I am the master  
 Of deserted villages and sprawling waste lands.  
 You feed lakhs of people for services rendered;  
 I too have hordes of wild animals—deer, samburs,  
 Tigers, roaming over and feeding upon my fields.  
 All my desires, my lord, are thus fulfilled  
 With your bestowal of such royal splendour;  
 And yet, this is why I am branded disloyal !  
 Lord, since you are my master,

You have conferred upon me, your servant, your own privileges.  
 If I stay here only  
 Who would know of my good fortune ?  
 Therefore, my lord, let me have a travel permit  
 To leave with all my treasures for other places;  
 Showing it off in different lands  
 Will surely be its proper utilisation.  
 These then are my kingly joys,  
 Recounted here only for your information.  
 But now having woken up from sleep,  
 The reverie is broken,  
 And, please listen to the reality, my lord.

In seven years I have not received even seven paise from you.  
How did I betray your trust ?  
What loss have I caused to the community ?  
I have no knowledge of what you have gathered ?  
Could I venture a guess ?  
On several occasions I came to your palace,  
Desperate, without food for many days.  
I waited for an opportunity  
To speak to you at your dinner.  
Seeing you riding the palanquin from a distance  
I bowed and came running to have a word, walking at the side,  
Only to find your ever-smiling face,  
Brighter than the full moon of autumn  
Suddenly turn crimson at my sight.  
Terrified like a fish struck on its head while moving upstream,  
I stayed back.  
How could I represent any grievance  
With my whole body petrified ?  
Despairing of ever regaining your favour.  
I left for some alien place;  
And came back eating a hundred or fifty,  
Which however vanished in no time  
Like a drop of water on a scorched shard.  
Living on that paltry earning for a couple of months  
I went to another place.  
How can I feed a fifteen-member family this way ?  
We took only one meal a day  
And somehow managed to keep the body and soul together.  
Should a master like you consider this satisfactory ?  
An old man of sixty, I have no strength left.  
My back, hips and neck are stiff,  
Only because of the strain  
Of writing on palm-leaves.  
I was endowed with a village  
That had lain fallow for ages.  
Tigers even breed there,  
And you knew of this !  
The bullocks of your chamberlain,  
When this land was in possession,  
Fell a prey to the tigers.  
He always failed to recover  
Even the seed sown on this land,  
And gave it up in disgust,

And yet your commander, the Baxi,  
 Allotted that very village to me  
 Promising to provide the oxen and paddy seeds.  
 My prayers were in vain.  
 He did not grant either a bullock or a seer of seeds.  
 The first year I lost six quintals.  
 Frustrated I left it fallow for two years.  
 This season, prevailed upon by all,  
 I sowed the land with the early maturing Biali paddy;  
 But I was late  
 Since I had to arrange a loan for the bullocks and seeds,  
 And lost everything in the flood.  
 How do I repay the eight quintals I borrowed ?  
 I now give a petition  
 For the resumption by your government of this endowment.  
 You may enquire and ascertain  
 If I received even a fistful of cowries,  
 Regard all that I have narrated as false.  
 All the farmers, farm labourers and ordinary wage-earners  
 Left for other villages.  
 When I went to them requesting their return  
 They chased me away brandishing sticks.  
 What power do I have  
 To compel them to return to my village ?  
 Had I been rich  
 They would surely come.  
 At present there reside only two farming families  
 And they have not paid their rent for three years.  
 Tired of repeatedly asking for the rent  
 At the end I reminded them of their pledge.  
 Even then they never admitted owing me anything ?  
 I am the head-man of the village.  
 My situation is like the famished reciter of scriptures,  
 Whose wife is strong and hefty like a wrestler.  
 My homestead has been usurped by ruffians  
 Strong and solid like hills.  
 I dare not even look at them  
 In the kindness of your heart, O my lord,  
 You granted a village to me—the Badajena the senior captain !  
 With a view to bringing it to your notice  
 I have written the whole story in verse.  
 Should you condescend to maintain me,  
 I beseech you in this old age—



Please grant me food and clothes;  
 Otherwise, kindly issue a permit for my departure  
 So as to enable me to leave  
 For some place while still alive.  
 I do not know if I have any abilities or not,  
 If capable of earning a livelihood, I shall live,  
 Wherever I may be, unto the last,  
 I shall be loyal to my lord the king.  
 Petitioned thus,  
 The king graciously ordered the commander-in-chief  
 To pay my wages in cash,  
 Which he did.  
 The king also provided me  
 With ploughs, bullocks and paddy  
 For food, fodder and seeds.  
 Summoning the tenants, farm hands  
 He issued suitable orders.  
 When the king is pleased  
 One has no further worries.  
 For us, the king is the lord of destiny.

*Rajananku Chhala Ukti*, 18th century

*Tr.* by Rajendra Prasad Das

## 2

### The Tale of Niti Vinoda

Again, Chanchalakshi spoke to Prince Mohananga: "O friend, I would love to listen to the tale of Niti Vinoda. Kindly narrate it for my pleasure".

The prince replied: "Darling, here I tell the story. Please listen.

It has been said:

"Morals increase wealth, generate noble  
 virtues, and help in the performance of  
 righteous deeds. They give pleasure to  
 people and are the promoters of success,  
 happiness, kindness, learning and  
 excellent achievements. They help in  
 discriminating between good and evil,  
 sharpen the skills for proper action and  
 are adornments of great men. Therefore  
 the wise worship morals for the  
 satisfaction of the inhabitants of the  
 three worlds".

There is a kingdom to the east named Kirtimandana. The name of the king of that country is Chandraloka. That king was without a second in the observance of the code of conduct, noble deeds, morality and dispensation of justice as well as the virtues of a brave fighter as befits the person of a noble lineage. His fame has spread all around. He treats his subject as his own son. In that country there was a Brahmin named Kushalakarma, with his wife, a son and a daughter. His family had four members. Because of his mastery in Vedic learning, king Amaratilaka, the ruler of the country named Bichitratunga invited him for a complete recital of the Vedas. That Brahmin stayed with the king for a long time for daily singing of the Sama Veda.

Then it so happened that one evening this Brahmin's daughter Kundarekha went to a well on the outskirts of the town with a pitcher to bring water. Tying a rope to the neck of the pitcher she dropped it into the well and while drawing up the pitcher after filling it up with water, she fell into the well, as her feet slipped. At the time a Brahmin named Pundarika Panda was performing his evening rites and prayer, sitting near the well. Seeing Kundarekha fall into the well, he left his prayers and rushing to the spot looked into the well to find her struggling in water. Seeing this that Brahmin jumped into the well and held up the girl. After considerable effort he managed to bring the girl out of the well. That Kundarekha on coming out carefully covered her body rearranging her clothes and then falling at the feet of the Brahmin, said: "You have given me the gift of life. How can I repay you for this kindness? Today I choose you as my husband. I shall repay your kindness by serving you as your wife. This is my firm resolve and it is the truth, truth and truth. I will touch no man other than you. If I do not honour this, may I collapse and die!"

Hearing this, the Brahmin said, "O maiden, why did you take such a resolution? You are now under the protection of your parents and therefore it is for them to decide as to who you should be given to. You can marry such a only person. It has been said,

As a child she is sheltered by the father  
In youth by the husband  
And in old age by the son;  
No woman enjoys independence.

Hearing this verse of ancient wisdom, Kundarekha said; "Should they give me to someone else, I shall end my life: this I swear". The Brahmin enquired, " Who is the witness of this?"

The maiden replied, " The eight guardians of the eight directions, the moon and the sun are my witness." At the time, a parrot couple who were listening to this exchange sitting on the banyan tree near that well, sang out melodiously. Kundarekha said, " O parrots, I have chosen this Brahmin as my

husband and shall not accept any one else as my mate; please bear me witness." Having talked thus, both Pundarika Panda and Kundarekha went to their respective houses.

There in the Bichitratunga kingdom the Brahmin Kushalakarma fell ill. He was exhausted by pneumonia and was unable even to move about. A Brahmin inhabitant of that city, Gopakadamba took Kushalakarma to his own house and nursed him. Since he served Kushalakarma with a lot of care for about three months, Kushalakarma promised to give him his daughter Kundarekha in marriage. Because of this pledge Gopakadamba treated Kushalakarma as his patron god and had no worry about his marriage.

Meanwhile due to the long absence of Kushalakarma, his wife suffered a lot in feeding and clothing herself and her two children. She did not receive any information about her husband. He was far away. Who could she send to that place! When her condition became unmanageable, she promised to give Kundarekha in marriage to a Brahmin of her city, named Chakrarasi and making the elders her witness, brought some money from the Brahmin and managed her household. The Brahmin Chakrarasi, certain of his marrying Kundarekha, started procuring the things required for the wedding. As an inauspicious period for marriage, when Brihaspati would enter the constellation of Leo, was approaching, Kushalakarma came home with Gopakadamba to give him his daughter in marriage before the onset of the inauspicious period. The Brahmin Chakrarasi, knowing of the approaching inauspicious period, had also fixed a date for his wedding. Pundarika Panda, remembering the promise of the maiden, was busy in getting the ornaments and jewellery made. When Chakrarasi learnt that Kushalakarma was about to perform the marriage ceremony in the temple, he came with the elders as his witness and in their presence forbade Kushalakarma in the name of the king to give his daughter in marriage to Gopakadamba. Thus when this dispute arose between the two claimants, both the grooms went to the King Chandraloka to present their grievance. That king after listening to these two thought, "Both appear to have strong claims; to whom should be given the bride?" Unable to decide the case, he summoned all the Brahmins and said:

"O honourable Brahmins! A place that has been desecrated by pollutants can be freed of the pollution only when washed by sacred waters. Therefore only the Brahmins shall judge the Brahmins. When you tell me who deserves the girl, then shall I marry the girl to that person".

Ordered thus, all the Brahmins — the Nandas, the Mishras, the Mahapatras, the Karas, the Rathas, the Acharyas, the Sarangis, the Bhattas, the Dubes, the Tiharis, the Panis, the Satpatis, the Patis, the Chakravartis, the Dasas, the Dishitas, the Munis, the Vyasas, the Chainis, the Pandas, and the Patris— all these came. The king also ordered the higher Samanta Brahmins in his court, "You too go with them." Thus the Rajaguru, the Rayaguru, the Brahma, the

Patajoshi, the Paharaja, the Paramaguru, the Purohita, the Badapanda, the Sadisa, the Khadanga, the Bhattamishra, the Bajapoyi, the Agnihotri, the Samantara, the Bahinipati; all these respected Brahmins entered the village of Kushalakarma. The Brahmin in charge of the petitions to the king, made them sit on the stone platform around the banyan tree near the well into which Kundarekha had fallen. When these honourable Brahmins asked the two Brahmin grooms to state their case Pundarika Panda stood up and said:

“O honourable Brahmins ! when you are about to render justice, kindly remember that I am to marry this girl. She is mine by right. Taking this into consideration you may render your judgement.”

All were surprised to hear this and enquired: “ How come? Please tell us how this girl is yours?

He replied, “ What can I say ? The eight Dikpals and the moon and sun are my witness. It is they who should speak”.

At this time the parrot couple sitting on the top of the tree started to chuckle and burst into shrill and melodious laughter. Thereupon the Brahmins enquired: “ O parrot couple! Why do you laugh?”

To this the parrots replied, “O wise Brahmins ! Learning, wealth and wife are determined on the basis of the attainments of the previous birth. Therefore, one who deserves this maiden shall surely have her. But before that we will narrate a tale. Will you please hear how king Gunagaura and the merchant Manjularupa got back their treasures after losing them just because they had earned them by themselves.?”

Hearing this, the Brahmins said: “Yes, let us hear that story”. Thereafter, the parrot named Bimba-Oshtha spoke thus:

“That there is a city named Kelikanchana, Gunagaura was its king. One day in the evening Manjularupa, a Vaishya merchant hailing from the village Jayaghisha was coming to Kelikanchana city to transact some business. Two *kosh* away from the city there was a forest in which a Savara named Bhimamukha was out hunting. When he came upon the Vaishya and noticed his bundle of coins he immediately set his arrow to the bow, seeing which Manjularupa threw the bundle and quickened his pace to reach his hamlet which however was too far away. So he entered the city. He was apprehensive of anyone catching sight of the bundle of coins and worried over finding a safe place for it for the night. Then he remembered that there was an actor, Sindura Nata, who was his friend, and therefore went to his house. Calling him aside he said: O great actor, please keep my treasure in your place for this night. I could not go home because it was late. Tomorrow I will go home with this treasure. Being such a dear friend, will you please keep this with you? Tomorrow morning I will take it back. Having said this, he handed over the bundle.

Sindura Nata thought: This treasure does not seem to have been earned by this fellow. He appears too shifty. Who knows how he got it and from whom?

Thinking thus he took the bundle and kept it in a niche in one corner of his house. The chief of police, Bhramana Singh, was the lover of Taranganayani, the daughter of the actor. At the time he was hiding in the space above the ceiling of the house. He saw the actor placing the bundle in the alcove and guessed that it must be something valuable. When Natabar went out, the chief came out of his hiding, finished his affair with Taranganayani quickly and left for his own home taking the bundle with him. When he came home in the second watch of the night, he found the front door shut. His wife Ratnaprabha was having an affair with Binodakanda, the son of the king. On the previous day Ratna in a fit of anger having refused to have sex with Binodakanda, the prince, had stolen and brought with him a bundle of jewellery from the palace, and while he was engaged in trying to win back her love by endearing words, he heard the police chief asking for the door to be opened. The prince immediately pushed the jewel bundle under the bedstead and hid himself in an inner apartment. Ratnaprabha opened the door and welcomed her husband who entered the room and pushed bundle of coins also under the same bedstead and left the room to wash his feet. Ratnaprabha having noticed her husband stretching his hands under the bedstead was apprehensive of his discovering the jewellery bundle and therefore when he left the room she wanted to remove the bundle from under the bedstead to another place. When she stretched her hand underneath, she found the coin-bundle and since her husband was re-entering the room, she had no time to keep it in another safe-place and just managed to throw it out through the open window.

Meanwhile, the merchant Manjularupa, having lost his treasure to the Savara after bemoaning his lot came into the city of Kelikanchana around the second watch of the night. He thought: Already it is late. How can I present my grievances to either the king or the minister so late in the night. It is better that I wait for the morning and then take such steps as I may consider proper. The police-chief would certainly know about all the thieves and dacoits of the town. It is possible for me to get some information if I hide myself near his house. Thinking thus, that merchant was hiding himself beneath that window. He heard the conversations of the king's son and the police-chief's wife. He then knew about the return of the police-chief. And when Ratnaprabha threw the coin-bundle, it fell near him. He immediately picked it up and recognising it to be his own, was overjoyed and left the place happily. The police-chief finished his dinner and decided to present the coin-bundle to the minister in the hope that if the minister is pleased with him—which he was certain about, with such a present—he may be of

great help to him later on. Since he was sure that his wife would herself appropriate the bundle if she found it, he decided to retrieve the bundle from under the bedstead and immediately proceed to see the Minister. Thus, when Ratnaprabha was away from the room, he gathered the bundle that was there. That bundle of course was the bundle of jewellery presented by the prince, as Ratnaprabha had earlier taken away the coin-bundle. The police-chief did not know this. Presuming that it was the same bundle that he had brought, he hid it in the folds of his garment and proceeded to the minister's place. He presented the bundle to the minister. When the minister unwrapped the bundle, he was surprised to find a lot of beautiful jewellery fit for kings. The minister decided to present the jewellery to the king, who, he was sure would be happy to have such ornaments and would be very pleased with him. Therefore, he presented the ornaments to the king. When the king saw them, he knew that those were the ornaments he had given to the queen. How could the Minister have the ornaments of the queen? He was filled with forebodings and asked the minister in confidence: Well, minister, where did you get these? Please speak the truth, otherwise you lose your life. Upon hearing this, the minister was scared and pleaded, "O King, Bhramana Singh gave these to me. I thought these were fit only for kings. That is why I presented them to you. I do not know how Bhramana Singh had them.

Hearing this, the king summoned Bhramana Singh and, taking him aside, asked in confidence, "Well, Bhramana Singh, when did you find the ornaments that you gave to the minister?" The police-chief was deeply worried. He was at a loss as to the reply he should give, and after some thought replied: My king, these were in my house. I brought them from my home and gave to the minister. The king thought, it will not look nice if a full-scale investigation is made as to how the police-chief took these palace ornaments. This should never be known to anyone outside. Since this police-chief has managed to take away the ornaments from the queen, what is there beyond him! He could even kill me ! Thinking thus he gave the police-chief a sharp look under which the police man wilted and began shaking all over. The king took this as an admission of guilt and decided that the man deserved to die. Then the king called upon one of his confidants and ordered him to get the police-chief killed. Accordingly his Commander Chandamukh took away Bhramana Singh and had his head cut off. Thus the king got back his own wealth and so did the merchant. Now wise ones, tell me who is to be blamed for the death of the police-chief.

While the Brahmins were engaged in discussing as to who is to blame for the death of the police-chief the female parrot whose name was Chitrakanthika said, "Well, Brahmins, you have heard Bimba-Oshtha's tale; now I am going to tell you another story. Please listen and give your considered judgement"

The Brahmins replied, 'Well then, please tell us, we are all attention'. Parrotess Chitrakanthika started narrating:

"That there is a country named Saradvipa. The name of the king's son was Rasikamali, the name of the minister's son was Netramandana and the name of the chief sailor was Hema Gaura. These three were very good friends, all of them young. They were handsome like the love-god, skilled in acts of war like Drona, as good as Karna in charities and sensitive like Bhima. A mere sight of their happy and smiling faces would disturb even the great sages; what to speak of mere young ladies! The three friends were not yet married, as suitable brides to match them were not available. Should they get good maidens, they would marry: this was their thinking. Their friendship was so great that they were "inseparable like milk and water; it was strong like the thunder-bolt of Indra, the king of gods; pure like the moon and sweet nectar". So close were they.

It so happened that one day the three friends rode out into the forest on a hunting expedition. Moving about in the forest they came to the foot of a great mountain named Basantapura. They saw a path going up and decided to have a look. Then getting down their horses, they started climbing the mountain on foot. After travelling some distance they reached the hermitage of Dhyanananda Gosain. The mountain was famed for turning the very old young and handsome like the god of love. There were many massive trees and creepers:

Jasmine, *malli*, *malati*, chrysanthemums  
and *juthi*, *tagara*, *tarata*, kunda,  
red and blue lotus, *bandhuli*, *niali*, *dayane*  
*lavanga* creepers laden with flowers,  
*parijata*, the heavenly flower,  
mangrove trees, palms, *sals* and mango trees,  
orange—both sweet and sour, *naranga*  
and *amla* were among the trees of the forest.  
At the touch of the south Malaya breeze  
eternally blowing, all the trees were  
fragrant like the sandalwood tree.  
They had sweet fruits, tasty as nectar  
Ripe fruits were coming down in cascades.  
And that mountain was the permanent abode  
of the ever-happy love-god, with all the  
seasons simultaneously present.

This great mountain had a river named Chandrabindu. The three friends reached the river. They saw a pavilion rising in the middle of the river. The pavilion was of crystal and on it was a maiden. How could one describe her

beauty! Her colour was a mixture of gold and *haritala*<sup>1</sup> the colour of her lips was like that of the red coral, her eyes were so beautiful that the doe and the darting bird left for the forest as their eyes and movements were no match and the fish entered water as its shape was no match to that of her eyes, a slow smile played on her lips and her pitcher-like breasts were outlined against the fine cloth covering her. The three friends on witnessing such beauty became immobile like graven images. As the elephant stops in its tracks at the mere prod of the goad, their feet stopped moving. Their eyes were submerged like fish in the waters of her beauty. That maiden cast her eyes on the three friends and after brooding over something for a moment stretched out her palm in some kind of a gesture. The prince and the sailor's son did not respond. But the minister's son drew six lines with his foot. When the girl saw this she crossed her hands in some other gesture and after a long look at the minister's son left for her inner apartment. Only the minister's son understood the secret message of the girl. Thereafter the three friends came to the hermitage of Dhyanananda. They saw the hermit sitting in yogic meditation. When on completion of his meditation the hermit opened his eyes, he saw the three friends standing with folded hands after having prostrated themselves before him. The hermit enquired: 'Well, my children, what has brought you here?' The three replied: 'O lord! You are omniscient, what can we tell you?'

The hermit had come to know about them through his meditation and said: 'You have come here in search of brides. Well, we have Chitrangi—a maiden as beautiful as a picture here. Here is a task for you. Once you do it, you will marry that girl. Tomorrow we observe the Siddhakarnika vow. For this, three things are required: the black jasmine of the Nagabali island in the south-sea, the golden screw-pine flower in the north-sea and the silver white dhatura flower in the western sea. Whosoever brings these by the time of my ritual completion of the observance of the vow shall marry her. The one who brings in the flowers first shall marry then. Please take your decision', the prince and the sailor's son responded; 'O sage! we have such powers that we could go round the world in a day and starting it the morning could return here before evening.' Having said this, the two friends prostrated themselves before the hermit and left. The prince went south and the sailor's son went north. Chanting the sacred incantations to their family deities, they moved faster than wind.

Pretending to go west, the minister's son secretly came to Chitrangi, the maid. She welcomed him, made him sit on a beautiful seat near her and enquired: 'Dearest, is everything fine with you?' The minister's son replied: 'Darling, your acceptance of me is all the good that I desire and then reported the departure of his friends to bring the flowers as desired by the hermit. Then Chitrangi said, 'I have already given my heart to you. Why do you

1. Yellow oxide of mercury.



worry ? If the eastern sun rises in the west, then maybe my resolve will be otherwise. Now please listen.' Chitrangi sang :

'O master of my heart,  
 Who created the love between the waterlily and the moon ?  
 Who can break  
 The love between the sun and the lotus, celebrated in all ages ?  
 Rati the goddess is made for Kamadeva, the love-god, Shachi is made  
 for the husband, the king of the gods;  
 Similar is the relation  
 between cloud and lightning,  
 Lotus and water,  
 Night and moon.  
 Once one's mind gets emotionally attached to someone  
 How can one leave him ?  
 Does the Malaya breeze leave the sandalwood tree in which the  
 serpent lives?  
 If one does not get attached  
 Who can coerce her for it ?  
 Is the *champak* flower bereft of any quality ?  
 But the bumble-bee never approaches it.  
 Lotus is graceful in the pond;  
 So is the moon in the sky,  
 So are virtues in man.  
 Jewellery on the body,  
 And coyness in a woman,  
 I am your slave for ever,  
 And you, the lord of my heart,  
 I receive you, offering you the garland of my mind.  
 Please have no apprehensions on that score'.

The minister's son was overjoyed to hear this. Then he went away hiding in a thicket near the hermitage. He saw the prince and the sailor's son presenting themselves at the same moment with the black jasmine and the golden screwpine flower. Both placed the flower in front of Dhyanananda and prostrated themselves. The minister's son came to the hermit's presence empty-handed and said, 'I could not find, the silver *dhatura*,' The hermit looked at the three friends and noticed a glow on the face of the minister's son. 'It seems fate has taken a hand, of course, it is capable of undoing the done and doing the undone', mused the hermit and closed his eyes in meditation. It was revealed that the maid Chitrangi had already chosen the minister's son. He was perturbed. These two had brought the flowers after a lot of trouble and now have nothing to gain. The minister's son did nothing and yet is to marry the girl. This is the doing of fate. What could I do even if this amounts to breaking my own word,' "he thought and said: 'Well, Rasikamali and Hemagaura, both of you came in with the flowers at the

same time. Who then will marry. This is not a question of gold, silver, pearl or rubies that you could divide and take your share. She is a woman and can have only one and not three people. That is why I ask. You decide who is to marry her. One who is destined to have that bride will have her, neither you nor I can do anything about it.'

When the Brahmins started to ponder over the problem posed by the parrotess Chitrakanthika, the parrot Bimba-Oshtha spoke:

'Well you learned ones ! You are masters of the four vedas, the six shastras, the nine grammars, the eighteen Puranas, Kavya, Drama, Rhetoric, the Kautake, the Shilpa, music, astrology, the theories of knowledge, medical sciences, the theory and practice of arms and armaments and the code dealing with one's duties and matters of faith and the like. I am going to narrate a tale. Please consider and decide.

'There was once a cowherd named Gandhabakula. The name of his wife was Binodini. He had a son named Bimba. This Gandhabakula was in service far away from his home. He used to come home in six months or in a year and spending some time with his wife and son and after leaving some money with them to meet the expenses on their food and clothing, he went back to his job. His wife Binodini was attracted towards a barber named Balimukha and was spending all her time with him. The people of the town reprimanded her for this attraction. Thus the two could not indulge in their little affair openly and decided to run away from the town to some other place where they could live without worrying about their fellowmen. Thus the cowherdess and the barber both ran away one night taking the cowherd's son with them. They came to the house of one Manadatta, a money-lender in a place called Chandrabimba. There they thought, 'This boy is now grown up, lest our secret is revealed through him, we might as well sell him off. Thus, they approached the money-lender Manadatta, 'We would like to sell this boy. Why don't you buy him?' Manadatta was impressed with the good looks of the handsome Bimba and with the prominent money-lenders as witness, he made out a purchase deed and bought the boy, handing over some money to the cowherdess. The barber and the cowherdess left for a distant place. Manadatta was bringing up the boy like his son. Some days later Manadatta went to a place along the banks of a river named Patali and there he lodged himself with Bimba. One day when Bimba had gone to the river to fetch a pitcher full of water he slipped and was carried down by the strong currents of the river which was in spate.

'First it was a river in spate in the month of heavy showers, the Shravana, and the waters over-flowing the two banks; the currents were so fast that even the wind could not keep pace with them. As Bimba was floating down and was on the verge of drowning, he found a huge dry log of wood and

saved himself by resting upon it. As Bimba floated in midstream resting on the log, he reached a city named Bidrumamali, whose king Chandabahu and queen Ratnamidhi were watching the flooded Patali river, sitting on their terrace.

The swift currents and the whirlpools,  
 The playful crocodiles and sharks,  
 And huge trees on the banks once stable like Mount Meru,  
 Falling with a great splash into the swollen waters,  
 Having been uprooted  
 And moving down swiftly with the current  
 producing a good deal of noise,  
 And the thick foams and the water  
 coloured a deep crimson,  
 And such other wonderful and awesome sights,  
 The royal couple were happy to watch.

And the queen caught sight of Bimba floating down sitting atop the log. She saw him being carried down helplessly in spite of his efforts at steering the log with his tiny hands and feet. She was appalled and spoke to the king: 'See, a person is being carried down by the swollen river. He appears to be a small child. I beg of you to please save him and bring him to me.' Saying this, she touched the feet of the king. The king came outside and summoned some boatmen to rescue the boy.

'At the time, a sea-faring trader had anchored his boat at the edge of the river. When he saw Bimba, he asked one Makarachheda, one of his boatmen, to immediately take a small boat and rescue the boy. He even offered a reward of one hundred rupees, and the boatman managed to save the boy after a lot of effort. He brought the boy to the trader who took the boy and gave one hundred rupees to the boatman. The trader nursed the boy back to life after warming his body with fire-treatment.

When Manadatta, the money-lender was informed by some people that his boy had fallen into the river, Manadatta rushed to the river and could see no trace of Bimba. He also had boats search for the boy far and wide only to return disappointed. When Manadatta failed to find Bimba, he returned to his place, bemoaning the loss. The boatman trader took Bimba to his lodge.

The king Chandabahu told the boatman he had summoned, 'A boy is floating down the river. Anyone of you who rescues him will receive five hundred rupees from me. The boatmen began their search in right earnest and while they were at it, news was brought to Chandabahu that the boatman-trader had taken the boy to his lodge. Hearing this, the king himself went to the trader and said. 'I had sent boats for the child's rescue, but you had saved him earlier. Hand over the boy to me. This is my kingdom and I

have every right to him and I will certainly have him'. The trader replied : 'I paid the boatman a hundred rupees and brought the child from the river. By the time your boats would have come to that place, the child would have moved a further two miles downstream. How could you have saved him ? I will never give him up. King, you should not perpetrate such an injustice.'

'As the king and the trader went on arguing, the news spread. When Manadatta heard the news, he came with his purchase deed and said : 'That person had already been bought by me. Here is the purchase deed. He only fell into the river while fetching water. I was coming to his rescue with boats and you managed to have him. Now, hand over my man to me; I will take him.'

While those three were advancing their arguments for the boy, the cowherd Gandhabakula returned home to find it empty. He was told that the barber had eloped with his wife and son. Having heard this, he began looking for his son asking all and sundry for information. As luck would have it, while going about in this manner with a heavy heart, he came upon that place to find his son in the lap of the trader. Finding his son, he struck his hands against his chest and said : 'This indeed is my son. After all these days, I feel as if I am living once more. Give me my son, I shall take him.' Thus the cowherd started staking his claim.

Bimba-Oshtha, the parrot, asked : "Now tell me, you learned Brahmins, which of these claimants should have the boy in all fairness?" While some of them said that the king had the right, others said that the father should have him. Still others said that he was to go to the money-lender, while some others said that the trader had the best claim. Since there were so many different opinions, they could not come to a decision and started quarrelling.

The parrot and the parrotess then said : 'Why do you quarrel, you wise ones ? Why do we render so many different verdicts ? Listen to what we say: If Bimba is to go to his father, then Kundarekha should marry the man Gopakadamba chosen by her father Kushalakarma. If not, then should the boy go to the money-lender Manadatta, then she should marry Chakrarasi, the man chosen by her mother. If the king gets the boy , then she should marry the one decided by the king. If on the other hand the boatman-trader is to have the boy, then she ought to marry Pundarika Panda.'

When the parrotess and the parrot spoke thus, the Brahmins examined the cases in the light of the finer points of the law codes and unanimously concluded that the boatman-trader had the right to have Bimba. The parrots asked : "Why should Bimba go to the trader ?" The Brahmins replied : 'Oh, what use were the father, money-lender and the king ? Had not the trader rescued him he would have been dead. In another few minutes he would have been in the ocean. As the trader saved his life in all fairness he deserved

to have him.' Then the parrots said, 'Therefore Kundarekha should have Pundarika Panda as her husband. Please ask what transpired between Pundarika Panda and the girl.'

Hearing this, the Brahmins enquired of Pundarika Panda : 'What happened between this girl and you ?' He replied, 'These parrots saw and heard what happened between us. You hear from them'. The Brahmins said, 'O parrots, please tell us what you know of this. '

'Following this the parrots narrated the whole incident from Kundarekha's falling into the well to her choosing Pundarika Panda as her husband. Having heard the whole story the Brahmins said, 'This is like the story of Bimba, Pundarika Panda has given the gift of life to Kundarekha. Kundarekha has chosen him as her husband calling upon Dharma to bear witness. She has also vowed to die, should another man touch her. Selecting a husband on one's own is considered the best in all ages. Her choice in this case appears to be at the instance of gods. Therefore Pundarika Panda deserves to have Kundarekha.'

Everybody was happy that the verdict was arrived at in this manner. This is the end of the tale of *Niti Vinoda*.

Chanchalakshi was happy to hear thus from Mohananga.

*Niti Vinoda*, 18th century

Tr. by Rajendra Prasad Das

## To the Round-eyed One

CHANDAN HAJURI

CHANDAN HAJURI flourished in the last part of 18th century. Though he was staying at Puri most of his life, perhaps he was somehow associated with the village Balanga, P.S. Nimalara, Puri. His bhajan "Chakanayan" and "Badasrungarbessa" made him famous as a poet. According to some, Chandan Hajuri and Chakhikhuntia were only two names for one man. Chakhikhuntia took a leading part in the struggle for independence in 1857.

To the round-eyed one,  
 Some one fallen from grace  
 And waiting for redemption,  
 Stands behind the Garuda pillar  
 And breathing hard  
 Calls out :  
 "Enemy of the Crane Demon, listen to my sorrows :  
 Your fame is being drummed everywhere.

Why in your deaf ear you do not listen to me,  
 You, who perform miraculous deeds ?  
 To the elephant, the deer and Draupadi in danger  
 You listened, and O Hari ! you saved them.  
 You gave innumerable riches to poor Sudama  
 In complete fulfilment, O Ocean of Grace !  
 Keeping whose grace in mind  
 I am finished, O Hari !  
 You did not cast your graceful glance at me,  
 O Long-armed One, I am a fallen man,  
 A thousand times worse than Anamila.  
 If you do not save me from this shameful existence,  
 You take out the flag from the wheel.  
 I think in my inner-most being  
 That, after beating your drums.  
 As the saviour of the afflicted,  
 You are forgetting everything now.  
 I have not served my father and mother,  
 Every moment I have kept evil company.  
 I have not bathed in sacred rivers.  
 I do not listen to Gita and Bhagavat.  
 I only think of the one in yellow-clothes,  
 I wish you take out my name from the list of Chitrachudra,  
 The gate-keeper of hell, when my end approaches.  
 You who sleep on banyan leaf and save everyone from trouble,  
 You reside in everybody and know everything.  
 The feet which are served by Lakshmi,  
 Even concentrating on them my troubles did not vanish  
 O wearer of dancing clothes,  
 O Lord, quickly listen to the entreaties of this poor man.  
 Friend of the Pandavas, why are you punishing me ?  
 How does it look to the outside world ?  
 In a moment for the sake of friendship  
 With a single arrow you killed Bali.  
 The dancer of *tandava* you made a fool of,  
 Using the illusory power of Vishnu, confusing him in the process.  
 I am afflicted, I have none in the world.  
 Saviour of sufferers, please save me from all sufferings.  
 You were, O Shyama, the charioteer of Arjuna  
 In the Mahabharata war, the egg of the Bharatya bird,

You saved under the bell,  
 The life of the mother and the father bird  
 And maintained your reputation of greatness,  
 You are the saviour of the lowliest;  
 That is why I took shelter in the elder brother of Lakshman,  
 Giver of happiness to Lakshman,  
 As competent saviour of those who have none to save,  
 There is no parallel to you.  
 You have torn the heart of Hiranya with your nails  
 Wishing to save the prestige of Prahlad.  
 Wearer of garlands, the Rahu of affection  
 Is devouring me bit by bit.  
 Don't you have a sword in your store ?  
 Your greatness is not to be seen.  
 My heart is going to burst.  
 Cool me by sprinkling the waters of your grace  
 Into the mouth of the *chataka* bird, my mind.  
 You who lifted the Mandara mountain,  
 You who live in Nilagiri,  
 Why are you sitting like a cave-dweller ?  
 Shiva, Brahma and Indra worship your feet.  
 \* God of gods, leave your deceit.  
 The lotus feet of the son of Nanda :  
 Chandana Hajuri worships them."

*Chakanayanaku*, 18th century

Tr. by D.P. Pattanaik

## A Weekly Market

NILAMBAR BIDHYADHAR

*Prastab Chintamani* (Prastāb Chintāmaṇi) by NILAMBAR BIDHYADHAR (Nilāmbar Bidyādhār, 18th century) was published by Berhampur University in 1911 under the editorship of Satya Narayan Rajguru, who traced it out from among the palm leaf writings preserved in Bhanja Vihar. It offers an elaborate description of the social, political and economic scenario of that period. The author was the elder brother of Bhramarbar Roy, the ruler of Khallikot (now in the district of Ganjam) in the 18th century:

The following excerpt from *Prastab Chintamani* gives a realistic account of a weekly market.

"I would like to buy a skimmer", that mother tells her daughter in the market. The daughter replies, "Yes, Mother, you can purchase one as we do not have it." Then they buy a skimmer. The daughter-in-law requests her mother-in-law : "Mother, please buy a pot-washer for me. To wash the pots without the help of a pot-washer wears out my nails". Then they buy one. The market consists of varieties of shops of different items. Local people come here to buy and sell household articles and for other requirements of daily life. They buy cheap imitation ornaments. Some purchase bangles and bracelets. The shop-keeper fits the bangles into the hands of women with his expert hand. The bracelets pass over the delicate fingers of women to their wrists. They often enter into a bargain with the shop-keeper in the purchase of chains made of beads of glass. There are neck-chains of different designs and colours— single-ring chains, double-ring chains, triple-ring chains, etc. — that offer a wide variety of choice.

The market is a cross- section of buyers and sellers, and meeting place of the people of the locality. They do have friendly chat and meetings, initiation into marriage negotiations and discussion of the business of life. The debtor cunningly tries to avoid the money- lender lest he should be heckled by him. A nervous and fearful debtor, if noticed by the money- lender, pleads in a supplicating tone, "Sir, I have been looking for you in the market. I have brought the bond paper. You tell me the sum total of the capital and the interest. I shall clear half of the debt now. I would furnish the agreement to pay back the rest of the amount the next year". The money- lender nods and says, "I will see it"

Two friends meet, exchange smiles and embrace each other. One friend expresses great joy and says, "What an auspicious occasion ! It is at an opportune moment that I could meet you. How are you? How are the others in your family ? Are your children in good health ?" The second friend replies: "Dear pal, all is well save the misfortune that a girl child born to my wife passed away on the fourth day of its birth." Then his friend consoles, "Don't lose heart, my dear. That you live is the great thing to count." The other friend enquires, "Do your family get along well?" "All is well by the grace of the lord. The only deviation is that most crops in the farm caught fire. It damaged seven bags of rice. It became a difficult task to extinguish the fire."

Dandies move in twos holding hands together. They take a round in the market and feel entertained. A pupil goes to his teacher and wishes him with great respect. The teacher blesses him from his heart, "My dear child, may God bless you ! May your ambition in life become a reality !" Then he en-



quires of the pupil : "Are you well?" The pupil replies in a humble tone, "Revered Sir, I am well by being blessed by the dust of your feet. Only my father has been suffering from abdominal troubles for the last six months. So I don't happen to meet you very often. It is my bad luck." The teacher advises him to consult the physician. He earnestly wishes that God will take care to cure his father. He expresses his hope that he will not suffer from the loss of his father at such a young age. The pupil gives some bananas and sweetened fried rice to the teacher, touches his feet and returns home.

The businessman catches sight of the customer who had not repaid the credit amount that he had taken the other day. He taunts the defaulter customer: "It is too much. Pay the money back and then you go. I know that you are not honest. There should be no business transaction with such a dishonest person as you." The defaulter customer said, "Why feel so upset? Such things happen in business." "I know your integrity. You are a brass-faced one. Give my money back before your self-respect is soiled." The other man pleads, "You have waited for such a long time. Give me another thirty-eight days so that I shall pay back the amount." "I do not have to trust such a bastard as you are. You arrange a surety for you", says the angry businessman. The customer says, "Who will like to be my surety for such a meagre amount ? Rather you keep my finger-ring as mortgage. I shall pay your credit amount back within four days and then release it." He offers him the ring. The businessman examines it and says with disapproval, "It looks as though made of brass. Who knows how much it costs ? What shall I do with it ? Give me any other thing." In the prime time, the defaulter customer's mother reaches the spot and tells the businessman, "Why do you heckle my son in such a market place ?"

"Listen, you bitch, your son, the cheat, has not paid back the credit money for the last four months. He is caught today. I tell you, give back the credit-money otherwise I will sue you in the Court of his Highness, the King Bira Bikram Keshari. Do you think there is no fair play or justice in his court ? In the name of the king, give the money today."

Thus, they exchange hot words, quarrel and enter into a duel. They kick, slap, twist ears, pull hairs, deal blows and throttle each other. They wrestle and fall to the ground. They roll on the ground and bleed.

It is the busy main market of Sulash Patna. People from around in the radius of sixteen kilometres have come to the market.

A crowd is collected; there are such untoward incidents. Men and women gather there. It is almost a scene. One of the women says : "Please, disengage them. Otherwise they will kill themselves fighting." "Who the hell are these

two?" Someone sneered in the crowd, "He is Ananta Sahu of our village. He is the younger son of the sweet-maker. Who is the other combatant?" Someone standing near him replies : "He seems to be the brother-in-law of the money-lender, Fakir Chand of Bikrampur, Patna." They do not heed any advice. They might end their lives. The crowd disengages them. The brother-in-law of Fakir Chand speaks in a great fury : "Wise people as you are, listen to me, this son of a beggar-maid borrowed money from me. When I asked him to pay it back, he assaulted me". Ananta Sahu pleads on his behalf : "Ay, you scavenger! Why did you fall upon me while I was prepared to pay it back? Let us seek justice in the king's court." He smears ashes on his body, tears his clothes and makes napkin out of it and shouts at the top of his voice, "Oh, you all are witnesses to the assault done to me. It is sheer injustice. Is there no justice in this state?"

People make mutual solution of their conflict. One money-lender offers himself as the surety for the loan. They return home in peace.

In the market, people buy and sell different kinds of oil, turmeric and varieties of articles. Buyers and sellers flock to the market for business transactions in the first half of the morning. The business of the market comes to a close about dusk. People of nearby locality return to their places. People of far-off places stay there in the night and start for their places the next morning. When the mother returns, her daughter jumps around her and begs her: "Show me, my dear mother, what have you brought for me?" The mother-in-law, receives the daughter-in-law, the son-in-law his father-in-law and they receive their purchases. The market of Garch Patna in the State of Bhab Nagar meets every Monday.

From *Prastab Chintamani*, 18th century

Tr. by Lakshmana Nayak

## Two Poems

BISHWANATH KHUNTIA

BISHWANATH KHUNTIA (Biswanāth Khuntia, 18th century) was a resident of Puri during the reign of Raja Dibyasingh Dev of Khurda.

The two pieces given here, *Hemaharini* and *Aha Dhanurdhara Bira*, are from Khuntia's extremely popular and highly melodious one-volume Ramayana entitled *Bichitra Ramayana* (Bicitra Rāmāyaṇa) or after his name, *Bisi Ramayana*. Its language is simple, touching and musical, and the work is often recited or staged, particularly in villages.

## 1

## The Golden Deer

The golden deer runs—  
The world becomes beautiful,  
It runs away;  
Raghumani runs after it.  
It slips and runs.

Sometimes, it is out of sight,  
Sometimes one sees it,  
Sometimes it is far away,  
Sometimes it is near,  
And sometimes nowhere it is seen.

It ran far away  
And Rama ran for it  
Then it vanished,  
Rama sat under a tree  
Then it appeared, so close.

It should be killed, he thought;  
He aimed an arrow on the bow,  
The arrow flew,  
It sounded like thunder rolling.  
The deer shrieked in Rama's voice!  
"Oh Lakshman, save me!"  
"Oh, Sita, save me!"

Then it fell on the earth,  
No longer in a deer's body  
In its own body; the demon,  
It died.

Ramachandra was startled, confused,  
It's wrong, it's calamitous, he thought,  
It's not a deer,  
It's a demon;  
And there are ornaments all over its body.  
If hearing my voice Lakshman comes; he wondered,  
If he leaves Sita alone, who knows: he was afraid.

And then Rama's left arm shivered  
His left eye twitched,  
And jackals ran after him  
And howled hoarsely.

2

Sita's Grief

O great archer, great hero!  
Didn't you have arrows in your hands?  
How can this foolish Prahasta kill him  
Whose arrows can burn the world?

He was unwilling to bring me  
He knew this might happen,  
But foolish I was, I could not stay away,  
And now this is my fate, O Lord!

If a woman dies before her husband  
She is virtuous,  
But if she outlives her husband  
How is she, what would people say?  
Oh, she is sinful!

He is immortal, the sages said,  
I won't be a widow, they again said,  
How is it, is it all wrong?  
How comes this, O Lord!

And now Lakshman goes back home,  
He informs my mother-in-law  
That Rama is no more,  
That demons have taken away Sita,  
And will she ever live to tolerate this, O Lord!

You know all the ways.  
Why couldn't you keep awake at night?  
I became an evil night to you,  
For me my husband died, O Lord!  
She stared at his arrow and bow  
And continued great sorrow, crying and moaning,  
And all the while praising her husband's great deeds.

## Selections

### ABHIMANYU SAMANTSINHARA

ABHIMANYU SAMANTSINHARA (Abhimanyu Sāmantsinhāra, 1757-1806) was born in an affluent family at Balia, near Jaipur in Cuttack district, and was by family tradition a Vaishnavite. A scholar, a linguist, he was well educated. He wrote a number of Kavyas including *Bidagdha Chintamani*, his most famous work, written in musical, ornate style and dealing with the Radha-Krishna theme. The Kavya was in 96 cantos, and from the point of view of the story, incomplete.

Given below are three extracts from *Bidagdha Chintamani* dealing respectively with (i) the agonies of Yashoda at the thought of Krishna alone in the forest (ii), the agonies of the love-lorn Radha at being away from Krishna and (iii), the pains of Radha at the slight suffered at the hands of Krishna, as well as two songs also dealing with the Radha-Krishna theme.

#### 1

#### Delayed in the Forest

Krishna is late, delayed in the forest,  
And the mother worries in parental affection,

O my black diamond!

You are my only child  
The only treasure of my poor home,  
You are like a stick to the blind  
Like a chain of jewels to my heart,

O my black diamond!

You are like life to my soul,  
The cynosure of my eyes,  
Can I forget you ever  
You are the limit to my happiness,

O my black diamond!

You are afraid of darkness  
And you tend cows,  
Why are you so cruel to us,  
To the happiness of your parents?

O my black diamond!

You are the only son  
In my old age,  
You are like sandal paste  
To cure my heart's burning,

O my black diamond!

You never even taste the best of cream  
And yet as you dance  
You always ask cream as bribe,

O my black diamond!

You always topple down,  
Whenever I lift you,  
You are so weak,  
And where should I go, tell me?

O my black diamond!

I am always afraid  
Thinking how witches are fond of you,  
And whenever you go to forest  
I hesitate again and again,

O my black diamond!

I can hear the noise of  
Prowling animals,  
And what a witch I am :  
I permitted you to go to the forest,

O my black diamond!

You may be sweating  
In the sun's heat,  
You may be sitting fully tired  
Under a tree,

O my black diamond!

Why didn't you take your clogs  
And umbrella,  
The forests are full of thorns  
That prick your feet,

O my black diamond!

My ears are always turned  
Towards the sound of your flute;  
I hear none today,  
I am so worried,

O my black diamond!

Your elder brother is more crazy  
Than you,  
Why didn't he pacify you  
And leave you here,

O my black diamond!

My eyes were content  
Looking at your sweet notoriety,  
You left me blind, my son,  
In my great affection,

O my black diamond!

Looking at the shadow  
You could puff your chest  
In so many ways,  
And you could blow your flute  
So aptly, so skillfully,

O my black diamond!

You cry for berries, my son,  
And crying you roll in dust,  
And you are so frolickingly dressed  
In a flower garland,

O my black diamond!

You are adept at dance, my dear,  
And you are dressed so beautifully,  
Your lips are red  
And the smile on your lips, how beautiful it is!

O my black diamond!

\* \* \*

You gave me time to come  
But you didn't come,  
Did you quarrel  
With somebody again?

O my black diamond!

Or, have you gone to a distant forest  
I couldn't know,  
How foolish I was  
I didn't go with you,

O my black diamond!

I am looking for the sun's rays  
Like a wounded deer,  
The day never ends soon,  
It's like an age,

O my black diamond!

Let somebody go to you  
And tell you of my sorrow,  
You will surely know, my son,  
All your mother's affection,

O my black diamond!

Should I run to the forest,  
I am so nervous,  
Milk trickles out from my breast  
And runs in streams,

O my black diamond!

\* \* \*

You sleep in my lap, my son,  
And when you wake up, my dear,  
Startled, you cling to me  
And call me "mother",

O my black diamond!

Such a son will go to the forest  
O, my fate,  
How can a mother live then,  
How can she told her life?

O my black diamond!

Haven't gods given sons to others,  
Who are as obstinate as you are  
Who should be?

O my black diamond!



## 2

## The Words of a Troubled Woman

She says in agony:  
 O my friend, find some remedy,  
 My love for Krishna, like a miser's greed,  
 Ruins me, O friend;  
 I am thirsty like a phelgmatic patient,  
 I am crazy like a drunken man.  
 Is love so versatile?  
 I never knew that;  
 It drowns one moment,  
 Burns another,  
 It's like the blacksmith's forceps, O friend,  
 The mind is stunned as if haunted  
 And the soul's wind moves like a snake.  
 I can't survive if I don't leave  
 Oh, I can't leave even if I want to,  
 Like a snake catching a mole, O friend!  
 Is it my destiny to be so?  
 I become like Rahu who tasted nectar:  
 Like the restless crew in a drowning ship,  
 Whatever my bad eyes see, O friend,  
 It makes one unhappy;  
 The dark clouds in the sky,  
 Footsteps on the ground,  
 The *tamala* branches all around, O friend,  
 Like a magician's trick is Shyama's love,  
 Like mirages in all directions.  
 My sinful ears become my enemies  
 Oh, they listen to Shyama's flute all the time,  
 Like munching a hot sugarcane, O friend,  
 It gives me both pain and pleasure,  
 My nose can't avoid the fragrance, O friend,  
 I become like a bee shut up in a *ketaki* flower.  
 I can't understand what I hear  
 I can't know even if I see,  
 Even If I lose my senses  
 Like a person drunk  
 I greed for it again and again, O friend!  
 Shyama's beauty has made me mad.  
 Oh tell me, if you know any remedy.

You may say, O friend,  
 Who does not love,  
 And yet who becomes like me,  
 A fish is not like a snake, O friend,  
 It dies if it leaves water,  
 A *chataka* is not like a peacock, O friend,  
 Does its hunger ever go by seeing food?  
 All Shyama's tricks of love  
 And the sound of his flute, O friend,  
 Are all against me,  
 Like wind to fire  
 It spreads, O friends,  
 And adds strength to my enemy, the god of love,  
 All surround and pull at my heart, Oh,  
 Like all sinful crickets.  
 You may say, O friend,  
 If I want to love, let it be;  
 If I can't, I should leave it,  
 But if a bee is imprisoned  
 In the pollens of a flower,  
 Does it leave it even if it dies?  
 Do the bees leave their hive and honey,  
 Even if it is burnt and broken?  
 You may ask me not to feel,  
 Not to die feeling,  
 But the poets have said so.  
 How the soul yearns for the absolute,  
 See, the eyes don't recognize the eyes  
 Yet they know each other;  
 They are together.  
 You may say, if Shyama does not love,  
 Why should I yearn for him,  
 But if the sun does not care,  
 Where should the lotus go, O friend!  
 If Shyama is moon,  
 I am like the night-lotus;  
 Consider what is happiness, O friend!  
 Love is painful, you may say,  
 Why should I long for it?  
 Does a *chatak* bird go away from rains  
 Even if it is killed by thunder?  
 Even if the snake swallows the wind,

Doesn't the wind blow on fragrant hills  
 You may say, he is not mine,  
 why should I be so faithful to him  
 The sea and the waves:  
 Are they separate, O friend!  
 The lover and the beloved,  
 The tree and the flowers,  
 Are they different?  
 Oh destiny!  
 It gives nectar and disappoints,  
 It puts in ash when you drink,  
 It strikes thunder, O friend!  
 It's like an insect in the fire,  
 It burns and yet it comes.  
 You may say, leave him,  
 If it is so painful,  
 But water drowns,  
 Fire burns,  
 But who leaves fire and water, O friend!  
 Like fire to powder:  
 Both are finished.  
 How do you separate?  
 Since the time I played with toys, O friend!  
 He has followed me in so many ways,  
 I become like a poor man  
 Indebted to a money-lender;  
 So painful!  
 And now this love  
 Like a saw  
 Cuts me,  
 Always, ever, all the time!

From *Bidagdha Chintamani*, c. 69, 18-19th century

Tr. by J. M. Mohanty

### 3

#### Radha's Grief

Holding her hand, slowly,  
 Radha speaks to her maid.

Have you brought this sinful love  
 To take my life?

O my maid, please go,  
 And talk to my dearest friend:  
 Has he taken it up as a profession  
 To kill women?  
 Whatever he has said,  
 Is it true?  
 If you buy a slave  
 Would you kill her?

O my maid, ask that man of mercy:  
 What rule is it?  
 What pleasure he will get,  
 If he does what is not to be done?  
 I have offered my body and soul  
 To him, at his feet.  
 My destiny is given to him,  
 To his mercy,

O my maid, please tell my "treasure",  
 There is no other way for me.  
 Let him decide fairly  
 What he should do.  
 The *chakora* bird has no way  
 Beyond the moon.  
 How can a fish live without water!

O my maid, ask that great lover:  
 Has he thrown this slave  
 To drown on the sea of love?  
 And now the love-god will burn my heart  
 Continuously, always.  
 Can a woman, so helpless,  
 Tolerate this attack?

O my maid, ask Shyamabandhu this much,  
 What glory he will have  
 If he kills his own slave?  
 My treasure is my only solace  
 On the road of separation.  
 It is my destiny that has done this.  
 To whom should I complain?

O my maid, ask him not to praise me.  
Why should he suffer so  
For this luckless woman?  
If love is subdued,  
The lover's heat increases.  
Thinking if life leaves,  
One rots in the mire of sorrow.

O my maid, Krishna's greed for love  
Should go.  
Or else, like me  
He will be haunted by the ghost of love.  
Please beg of him for leave for me.  
From his kind presence,  
All virtues will be there  
If he donates dust from his feet.

O my friend, convey this  
To my life's lord :  
There will be glory  
If a poor woman is saved.  
Didn't you say  
What the lover said.  
That the bite of a hundred thousand snakes  
Is not equal to the bite of separation?

O my friend, ask my friend,  
What life is this?  
Can he leave me like this  
If he is true?  
Can the absence of lotus  
Affect the moon?  
But is not the lotus inconsolate  
Without the moon?

O my friend, tell my friend,  
How the moon loves!  
Does he ever leave the night  
Because it is black?  
See how the lotus and the bee  
Are joined together.  
The lotus enfolds the bee every night  
As it is obedient.

O my friend, tell my friend,  
How Shiva behaves,  
He accepts the poisonous snake  
Because the snake worships him.  
The bee always goes for the lotus,  
Does he ever go to other flowers?

O my friend, go and tell my friend,  
This is the way of life,  
Only lovers get glory in the world.  
It is not graceful  
To leave a slave  
Eventhough she commits a crime,  
The husband took Ahalya  
So gracefully, remember!

O my friend, ask my friend,  
Not to hold me wrong,  
I am drowning.  
Let him give me the buoy of his feet  
And rescue me.  
Even though he leaves me  
I cannot leave my treasure,  
Does a *chataka* bird leave the cloud  
Because it thunders?

O my friend, ask my friend,  
Did Rahu who tasted nectar,  
Give it up.  
Because his head was cut?  
I am committed for a hundred births.  
This is what I swear,  
I always hope so  
Though this may be my end, says Radha:

O my friend, tell him,  
The deer ran in mistake  
And died.  
But didn't it get the moon?  
My mind didn't take the lesson  
From the insect.  
Though it's burnt  
It never gives its body for love.

O my friend, tell him,  
I have other temptations,  
My greedy mind  
Never likes to leave its body.  
My heart now sticks to one lesson,  
And it has given up all other desires.

O my friend, tell him,  
All my permutations are over.  
Do whatever he may like  
I have taken him  
With a garland.  
For beauty I have loved  
The dark *calorium* or *collyrium*? of the musk-deer,  
For business I have entered  
Into the bad name of a bad woman.

O my friend, tell him,  
I have sacrificed my caste  
And now I am going to lose my life  
In penance.  
I have shown my head  
To the arrows of bad words  
Of bad men.  
I have given up fears  
Of my husband  
And the fears of the land of death.

O my friend, tell him,  
I have given up all considerations of people.  
This is my last word,  
I have squeezed the neck of my bird of pride.  
I have no way out,  
I have searched all the universe,  
Whatever may happen  
I have worshipped him,  
Him who grants all desires.

O my friend, tell him,  
I have gone through all conditions.  
And now the love-god like death  
Comes and troubles me.

And wants to take away my life.  
If he neglects  
My boat of love drowns,  
How bad it is, consider.

O my friend, ask him,  
If this is what he decides,  
I have a lord,  
And yet I feel  
As if I have none.  
He sowed the seeds of love.  
Now they have sprouted,  
I have lived so long  
Waiting for rains to come.

O my friend, tell him,  
How I burn in love.  
Whatever remains  
It uproots from the ground.

\* \* \*

The clouds rose  
But it never rained,  
And then the storms came,  
I don't know from where.

O my friend, tell him,  
All my hopes dashed,  
The thirsty bird *chataka's* heart  
Was burnt in the pyre of agony.  
Unless the sun moves  
There will be no rain.  
Can there be any cultivation of love  
In the heat of summer?

O my friend, inform him so:  
Let him consider what I have said.  
This is my prayer:  
Let him consider what I have said.  
This is my prayer:  
Let him not equate me with others.



O friend, that will lessen the love.  
 A wise man like him,  
 Shouldn't he know more?  
 Tell him once again,  
 How could he make his heart so hard!  
 O friend, convey to him my request,  
 Let him instruct me  
 How to get rid of love.

As she said,  
 She moaned again and again:  
 O my beauty, she said, and swooned,  
 O dear messenger  
 If this is the nature of love,  
 Burn it, burn it.  
 Poor Abhimanyu feels for the lady  
 And weaves his rhymes.

From *Bidagdha Chintamani*, c.75, 18-19th century

Tr. by J.M. Mohanty

4

What Charms the Dark One Knows

What charms the dark one knows  
 O my friend, what charms he knows!

Like sharpening a steel sword  
 He does not kill, but kills in the heart  
 What luck I escaped!  
 I would have been dead,  
 Oh, what that Shyama gallant did to me.  
 I know and my heart knows.  
 He never pays  
 And yet buys the youth  
 And knows the mind,  
 What can a score like this man will do?

He is one and the only one,  
 The Dark One.  
 He sits near Yamuna  
 Under the *kadamba* tree always.

And when you go to Jamuna  
 For getting water  
 He pulls at your saree.  
 The son of Nanda,  
 Who plays the flute.  
 Never leaves my mind,  
 Let my mind be with him,  
 The Dark One:  
 Thus rhymes the poor Abhimanyu.

*Kalia Ki Mantrajane*, 18-19th century

Tr. by J.M. Mohanty

5

The Flute Plays Again and Again

The flute plays again and again  
 How charmingly, O my friend,  
 In this forest!  
 In this spring  
 I miss my lover,  
 And the birds call in the forest:  
 The crow, the cuckoo and the magpie.  
 I wove a garland  
 With jasmine, *champa* and *nageswar*  
 I kept awake at night  
 Waiting for him,  
 But he did not come.  
 O my friend,  
 I have all condiments ready  
 All sandal paste, all scents,  
 Tell me, is he coming now,  
 At this moment?  
 I have worn a thin saree,  
 I wait for him smilingly,  
 I tell you, I will hang myself;  
 This is my truth.  
 His name pounds at my heart,  
 Where did he go.  
 The flute-holder?  
 At whose house did he spend his time?

Says Abhimanyu,  
The night is over  
As I think of him.  
Sitting on my bed,  
O my friend!

*Ghana Ghana Bansi Swona*, 18-19th century

Tr. by J.M. Mohanty

## Four Poems

### BHAKTA CHARAN DAS

BHAKTA CHARAN DAS (Bhakta Caran Dās, c. 1729-1813) was a Vaishnava poet who celebrated the immortal love of Radha and Krishna. His literary contributions include *Mathura Mangala*, *Manasiksha*, *Manabodha Chautisha*, *Kalakalever Chautisha*, etc. Four of his poems are given below.

#### 1

### O My dear Shyamaghana

"O my dear Shyamaghana" is an excerpt from *Mathura Mangala*. The poet depicts in this poem the reactions of the mother Yashoda when Kamsha sent messenger Akrura to invite Krishna and Balarama to Mathura. She apprehends some danger for her sons. So her maternal heart is shocked and wounded, and while making her son ready, she ruefully recollects the strange, unusual behaviour of the child Krishna. Finally, Akrura, the messenger, intervenes and requests the parents of Krishna and Balarama to avoid any delay. Both the sons are decorated properly and they sit on the embellished chariot. People of Gokul throng on either side to bid farewell to their illustrious sons.

O Shyamaghana, my dear,  
how shall I live here,  
if you go to Madhubhuvan?  
Whose face shall enliven,  
enrapture me?

All directions would look vacant;  
and my life would become restless  
doting ever your white absence.  
As though, I would be a fish without water,  
and a kingdom without the king.

On whose body shall I paste  
the sweet-scented balm?  
On whose eyes shall I draw  
the thin line of collyrium?  
Whom shall I put to sleep, patting?

Standing before your father,  
who shall ask for the moon?  
Reminiscing fondly all these  
I'll surely breathe my last,  
if you leave for Madhupuri.

Whose hair shall I comb with care?  
Whose crown shall I adorn with flower?  
Whose forehead shall I paint?  
On whose ears shall I fit rings,  
O my dear Shyam?

Whose concern my mind shall bear?  
For whom shall I be worried?  
From whose body shall I wipe out  
sweat, dirt and dust?  
Whom shall I so dearly dress, O my Shyam?

When you go to the forest  
You steal away my soul  
that endures no separation.  
Leaving me alone, you shall go to Mathura;  
but how shall I live here?

Without beholding your moon-like face,  
how can I live?  
I shall surely put an end to my life  
in the nearby pool, if you part  
from me even for a while.

When I offer you nectar like butter,  
Sweet and honeyed banana;  
instantly you throw away all.  
Despite all care and prayer  
you break the cooking pots.

Your absence would remove  
all such fun; all your mischief  
would fondly remain as a dream,  
my rare possession. Alas!  
what misfortune comes crowding on to me.

Scared of shadows easily  
you come to my lap and hide your face,  
At the sight of darkness, you tremble.  
You fail to climb high stairs.  
Don't get frightened

By the horses' neigh,  
and by the elephants' trumpets.  
Don't lose your heart  
at the wild uproar in Madhupur,  
O my dear Shyamaghana!

Looking at the rows of pictures—  
frightening—on the wall  
you shy away from the room.  
Now that you are heading towards Kanshapur  
you shall only see devils and demons.

Whom shall you hold, whom shall  
you adhere to out of fear?  
Whom shall you embrace  
shouting "O my mother!"?  
Who shall be your saviour and solace there?

Amid your slumber  
you woke up after a strange dream,  
and murmur strangely and uttering  
"Mother" you hang about my neck,  
and once again you go to sleep.

Recollecting fondly all your activities  
and habits, I shall breathe my last.  
O my dear Shyamaghana!  
Whom shall I wake up  
at the advent of the wakeful dawn?

Who being hungry shall demand  
food in the morn?  
Whom shall I forcibly feed with butter?  
Who shall break my curd-pot  
with the curd-churning rod?

Whom shall I chain for mischiefs,  
rare and fair?  
Who shall make me sing?  
Whose name shall my tongue utter?  
Whom shall I call out as the son of *Gopa*?

Against whom shall the women of *Gopa*  
lodge their complaints before me?  
From whose naughty hands shall I grab soil?  
Whom shall I ask to open the jaws?  
Whom shall I address as the rocking elephant?

In whose mouth shall I put sweets  
and butter? Stretching out my eager palms  
whom shall I beckon?  
Who shall take the cattle  
to the forest with Balaram?

Who shall tune the flute magically?  
Who shall dance at the centre of the crowd  
storming his curly hair?  
Whom shall the wistful people  
of Braja wales absorbed.

O my dear Shyamaghana!  
The world for me shall be bleak  
and colourless in your absence.  
How would I be able  
to watch such fun?

Who shall bring for Nanda  
his soul's solemn song?  
Whom shall I try to trace out  
in the avenues of *Gopa*?  
Whom shall I discover beneath a tree?

Who would now register complaints  
before Nanda, that the mother

has mercilessly beaten him?  
And how would Nanda, your father,  
punish me squarely?

Articulating these words ruefully,  
the queen of Nanda plants kisses  
on her son's cheeks; priceless tears  
overflow the embankments of her eyes.  
The air is torn with numberless sighs.

Beholding the blue face of her son,  
she painfully mumbles: 'My heart's  
matchless gem shall fly to Kamsha's palace;  
O Balaram dear, accompany Hari  
to make him fearless at Kamshapuri.

O dear Balaram, listen  
carefully to what I say:  
you are strong, fearless, but my Shyam  
is weak, he knows no trick, has no wit.  
There at Kamsha's palace

The witty one loses his wit;  
the mighty one loses his might;  
the wise one loses his balance;  
so, I advise you  
not to part company with my Shyam.

Don't venture to rush  
into the vast crowd at Kamsha's palace.  
No, no, don't mistake it  
to be friendly like Gopapur.  
There you encounter no houses of Gopis.

Don't make any noise or uproar,  
for if the fuming King Kamsha  
listens to it, he would be certainly angry.  
Don't excite his anger.  
Don't become the victims of his wrath.

O my dear Rama and Hari,  
reach there safe and return thence  
happily; impatiently and eagerly  
I would be waiting for your return to Gopapur,

or if you tarry, I would carry myself.  
 Rohini rolls on the ground;  
 tears dripping down her cheeks.  
 Embracing Balaram tightly, she weeps.  
 Rocking him dearly on her affectionate lap  
 she sadly mumbles.

"Behold! how the sweet moon face  
 of my son has waned. At last,  
 the evil-incarnate Kamsha could raise  
 the dust of doubt and suspicion  
 putting us in this ill-fated dungeon."

At such abuses against King Kamsha  
 Akrura, the messenger lost his temper.  
 Shouting at Nanda he argues,  
 hurry up, hurry up, it's time,  
 by dawn, make everything ready for the journey.

Humble Nanda mumbles: "O messenger,  
 don't be unkind! My sons are getting ready."  
 Akrura retorts in an odd rhetoric:  
 "Hurry up, hurry up, it's time,  
 King Kamsha knows no weather, no clime."

A lightning of uproar in Gopapura.  
 Leaving their hearth and home,  
 the race of milkmen come out;  
 Their mind astir, and heart restless,  
 for they would to the glorious sons bid farewell.

Nanda's dearest son did adorn  
 the chariot of Akrura.  
 The bemoaning women of Gopapura  
 came thronging to the chariot  
 obstructing its ways.

Bleak faces they wear,  
 their hearts heavy with uncertain fear.  
 The departing hero who can complete  
 a mission and a million assignment  
 all alone leaves for Kamshapura.



Balaram on the chariot is so elegant  
 that the wild elephant is no match.  
 Bewitched by the chariot's beauty,  
 the gopis encircle and softly mumble:  
 "What a miracle! how wondrous is the world!"

The huge avenue of Gokul  
 is filled with numberless people.  
 The sun of hope and happiness  
 shone on every bright face,  
 for they strongly believe  
 that Hari's visit to Mathura  
 would bring an end to Kamsha  
 and the entire earth would be redeemed  
 of the burden of interminable evil.

Gopinath amid fanfare crowns the chariot  
 leaving Bhakta Das a helpless compatriot.

From *Mathura Mangala*, c. III, 18-19th century

Tr. by Niranjan Mohanty

## 2

### A Letter from Kamsha

In "A Letter from Kamsha", another excerpt from *Mathura Mangala*, Bhakta Charan Das depicts the insurmountable pride of Kamsha through a letter which Kamsha has written to Nanda, the king of Gopa. The letter exhibits Kamsha's power, valour and wealth. The poet employs euphemistic devices and ironically portrays the pride of Kamsha in his own voice.

With ire immense and pride profound,  
 the fuming Kamsha has cleared his ground.

To Nanda, the king of Gopa, Kamsha has writ  
 ordering him to come over without losing his grit.

"If knowingly you make any delay  
 I would turn your head into clay.

Aren't you aware of my might and mettle?  
 Like a Ketu to my foes, I make them brittle.

Vowing to vie with me in battle  
the princes come to dust, harming me little.

I make the entire universe totter  
with my unageing wrath and temper.

When to the bow I fit my arrow  
the king of the jungle escapes somehow.

With my single fist on Chitrakut  
the lofty mountain loses its root.

When my triumphant banner does flutter  
heaven's guards choose to surrender.

Like Indra I'm capable of donating all;  
like the sea, I'm immense and unfathomable.

Wiser than Brihashpati am I,  
more conversant in vedas than Brahma.

No match do I find for my religiosity,  
nor even for my father-like ability.

To rule over my people and my country,  
where even the strongest storm fears to make entry.

Before my affluence and effulgence  
the god of fire loses his confidence.

Protecting the good, I destroy the evil:  
on this principle I keep my vigil.

Soldiers brave and warriors bold,  
beholding my fortresses, turn weak and cold.

When I begin my triumphal march,  
gods, flee their heaven's arch.

A gracefully gleaming moon I am  
in the lotus-forest of the Yadav clan.

None can match me in my fairness,  
not even Mother Earth can excel my endurance.

Fighting no battle, killing no soldier,  
I could win over the world entire.

What a strange proud fellow you are  
meeting me is not in your chart.

Living so close to my kingdom  
wantonly you behave at random.

You don't care to pay me due salute;  
you're haughty, high-headed and resolute.

Don't you know, at a single uproar of mine  
beings of the three worlds would at once wither?

Because of my grace and goodness rare  
I rescued them, giving them shelter fair.

Indra, the king of heaven, the moon and the sun,  
serve my feet and I make them run.

Kings haughty, warriors naughty, flee away  
listening to the triumphal tales' wondrous sway.

A foolish milkman you are, you pay no tax  
who'll save you when I burn your palace like wax.

My father-in-law is Jarasandha, the demon;  
brave Birakeshi, my fond companion.

Within the twinkle of an eye  
the entire universe I can destroy.

At my command are the heroes, brave and rare  
Sura, Naraka, Byoma, Agha, Chanur, Salya they are.

A mere blossom you are, don't provoke  
a catastrophic rain like me.

You are so petty and trifle  
you can be terminated by mist little."

3

The Parting

*"The Parting"* meticulously narrates the reactions of the *gopis* of Gopapura when Krishna is about to leave for Kamshapura with the royal messenger Akrura. The milkmaids become speechless. They experience death in life at the moment of parting. The poem evokes a perfect metaphor of desolation.

Forlorn and torn looked the women  
of Braja as they parted from Govinda.  
Loosened were their lofty braids,  
unkempt was their hair.  
Shattered were their necklaces,  
withered and trite their lips.  
Uneasy sweat flowing from their bodies.  
The bright landscape of their cheeks  
became bleak.  
The eyes of the deer shed showers of tears.

No words could bloom on their lips.  
No stir there was in their bodies.  
Their limbs remained motionless and still.  
Heavily throbbed someone's heart.  
Fiercely blew the breath like a wind.  
Someone thrashed herself on the earth,  
Someone beat her lofty bosom.  
Someone mumbled: "This time, death is certain."  
Someone heaped abuse on the paltry being.

Someone blamed the sad time.  
Someone scanned the horoscope prepared by death.  
Someone yelled "O! I'm lost; O! I'm lost!"  
And someone invited her companion  
to take poison. Someone offered a suggestion  
to jump into Yamuna.  
Someone proposed to consign the body to the flames.  
Someone offered herself to cut her throat.  
Someone planned to pluck her own eyes,  
for, at least, blindness would bring solace.

Someone even planned to murder  
Akrura, King Kamsha's messenger.

What the hell would Kamsha do?  
 No more we shall live, here  
 in his kingdom, under his wicked shade.

No more we need his wealth.  
 No more in his words we do have faith.  
 Elsewhere we would migrate and build our abode.  
 Let our lovable Krishna with us stay  
 Or else, let the messenger, Akrura, go away.

From *Mothura Mangala*, 18-19th century

Tr. by Niranjan Mohanty

4

### Hymns for the Mind

MANABODH CHAUTISHA (Hymns for the Mind) is philosophical in nature. It celebrates the difference between the physical world and the eternal. It brings to the surface the basic distinction between man's inner spirit and the external glamour. The entire poem bears an incantatory effect so that man's involvement in the materialistic aspects of life gets thwarted.

The contrite heart from within mumbles:  
 "O dear body, listen to what I say:  
 let's go and watch the round-eyed Lord.  
 After many a year today you're resolute  
 to carry with you all your acquisitions.  
 Alas! when the unkind bell tolls for you,

And the final moment tears  
 your breath, you would take nothing  
 to the eternal abode.

Hungry dogs and foxes would merrily dance  
 around your corpse; tearing apart the ribs  
 and bones of your chest, they'd feast on.

This body that once slept on cosy cots  
 would wither away and stink,  
 spreading the smell of rotteness.

Go and ask those who preceded you  
 how much of their possessions  
 could they carry in their bales?

Did you ever care to utter  
the name of the Lord? You wasted  
your lifetime accumulating wealth.

All that you earned, all that you possessed,  
are nothing, for, with the final toll  
you shall be called merely a ghost.

Your wife dear would weave  
a net of hymns about her frame,  
your house so dear would be closed

So as to deny entry to your apparition.  
And all your relations dear and near  
would themselves consecrate.

If at all you wish to hallow yourself  
from this vast sea of time,  
whisper only the name of the Lord.

As time closes in on you, you ripen.  
Like a portrait you look cute without,  
but you're so shallow and shattered within!

The sheen of your skin hides  
the stony rubbish of your age.  
Time it's for you to surrender

At the lotus-feet of the Lord.  
Falsely you do adorn your trifling frame.  
Abandoning conceit and conspiracy,

You must learn now how to pray.  
you must remain bound to Him,  
crowning your tongue with His name.

Only six pieces of slender wood  
you would need then; none would touch you,  
none would come to you then;

For you would be no more than a corpse.  
Yama, the king of the dead, knows no measure,  
cares neither for infancy nor for youth.

Yet how uncertainly and vaguely  
you dream of living longer!  
Who can escape the tight tether of Death?

Who can remain immortal  
hoodwinking Death? Only the Lord's name  
can save you from this game.

With dresses tidy and new  
you adorn yourself. Knowing nothing  
you delve into the illusory *samsara*.

Once you stumble and fall  
there's no rescue. Do the leaves,  
once withered and fallen,

Flutter on the boughs?  
Your mind astir, day and night.  
Rightly you dream in your sleep  
that none would go with you,  
none would give company to the shore  
of silence. All alone you've to go.

Everything is shadowy. All are shadows.  
Relations and friends give you company  
on the asphalt road.

Falsely and in vain you believe,  
'all is yours, everything yours.  
Once you shut your eyes,

the darkness, only the darkness.  
All that you had disappears,  
and you know, you've to go alone.

As a beautiful damsel hides her face  
under the veil, your body is strewn  
with such supinely secret ups and downs.

It is my advice and suggestion too.  
Devote yourself to the service of the Lord.  
Select a *guru*, genuine and truthful.

## Nine Poems

BALADEV RATH

BALADEV RATH (1789-1845) was an inhabitant of Badakhemandi, a place in southern Orissa. He was famous for his *Kishore Chandrananda Champu* and other *Sangitas*. He wrote *Chandrakala*, a Kavya and *Hasya Kallola*, a prose work.

Given below are nine of his poems.

### 1

#### In the World Only

The only outcome of this would be that  
people would laugh.

Let it raise its shoulder hair erect  
and bark loud in a mountain cave,  
let it gather its anger in its eyes  
and wear a ferocious look,  
but will a dog thus ever  
turn into a lion?

If it colours its eyes red  
and flits playfully in mango branches,  
if it acquires the cuckoo's wing and tail,  
will a crow ever sing  
as sweetly as a cuckoo?

It may drink cow's milk and leave  
the habit of eating dirt for a year,  
it may smear its body  
with the golden mud from the Ganga,  
but will a country swine  
ever become a cow?

If a crane colours  
its beak and feet red,  
puts a lotus stem in its mouth  
and walks tilting a little  
now to this side and now to that,  
will it ever be called a goose?



A colourful saddle may be put on its back,  
 and someone may ride it  
 brandishing a whip,  
 it may be fed on a variety of things,  
 but will a donkey ever turn into a horse?

Let it go and live in a forest,  
 fast for days and worship all gods,  
 let it try in several ways,  
 but will a glow-worm ever become the sun?

Can anything change its form and nature  
 given unto it by the Creator?  
 Let it take on as many castings as it can,  
 but will brass ever become gold?

Let it grow even in the garden of gods  
 and feel proud of its place of birth,  
 let it keep the company of the *tulasi* plants  
 will a *landabaguli*<sup>1</sup> plant  
 ever be called the *tulasi*?

He who does not understand  
 the language of his fellow men,  
 makes speeches only to be laughed at.  
 He does not realise he is dull-witted  
 and argues on grave matters with the learned.

One, who does not have the courage  
 or ability to bear  
 the mere touch of another's body,  
 shamelessly moves forward  
 to fight an elephant,  
 armed with only a small knife.

You fool, you know,  
 fate has ordained  
 your hair deserves only a *karanja* flower,  
 but you hope to put a *champak* in it,  
 the flower that adorns Lord Shiva's head.

1. A wild variety of *tulasi* or basil.

Can the fire lighted in the evening,  
when the sky is fluorescent with moonshine,  
emit any light other than the little  
that's natural for it then?

Let that man smear his body with ash,  
be armed with a *parasu* or axe  
and ride a huge bull,  
can he thus acquire the glory  
of Lord Shiva, Gauri's husband?

He, who is endowed with delicious sweets,  
eats them with relish,  
but another man, a wicked fool,  
chews and chews cow-dung cakes,  
just to defeat the pride of the first.

He, who has acquired  
virtue and glory through his noble deeds,  
failing to ride the king of the elephants,  
rides on a wooden cart instead.

Charcoal may take a dip in the waters of Ganga,  
but can it thus wash its blackness off?  
Can it ever look like a gold ornament  
and match the necklace adorning  
a young woman's breast?

If an ugly impotent old man,  
in his foolishness, competes with the one  
who is the object of the pursuit and desire  
of a seventeen-year-old maiden,

For its noble deeds done in its past life,  
the *gunjara* seed enjoys the company of gold;  
but if it thinks that it is equal to gold  
and claims to be as precious as the latter,

The lion tears the elephant apart  
and feasts on the fresh meat of the latter's head,  
it leaves the other carcasses for the jackal,  
if, therefore, we call the jackal a hero.

If Raja Jagaddeba Harichandana  
 passes without wishing  
 the emperor of Baghel, the elephant among kings,  
 the saviour of mankind, the generous protector,

Says Raiguru Kabisurya,  
 the poet of his Sudharma Court,  
 if man, whose body is full of pores,  
 claims equality with the million-eyed Indra,

The people around will laugh,  
 This will be the only outcome.

*Jagate Kebala*, 18-19th century

*Tr.* by Saubhagya Kumar Misra

2

Prayer to Snake

It hurts:  
 all that you've been doing to me,  
 so whether you forgive  
 or destroy me with punishment,  
 O lover of Lakshmi,  
 I'll scold you today, O Jagannatha,  
 to my heart's content.  
 O Kripanidhi,  
 that you are the ocean of kindness  
 the learned say out of fear.  
 You're, however, the serpent of time  
 and devour the life-breath of all,  
 O Kripanidhi.

You, god of gods, have sunk  
 your house to the bottom of the sea,  
 You are a sinker of houses,  
 It's then not surprising  
 if someone else  
 should practise your skill,  
 O Kripanidhi,  
 if you command me to show  
 your similarity with a snake,  
 I will show it.

Here I stand to do that,  
but remember  
I'm no sinker of houses.

The snake is called the *chakri*,  
And so are you known in the world  
for you wield a *chakra*.  
The snake is also called the *kundali*,  
and you, Kripanidhi,  
especially wear in your ears  
a pair of crocodile-shaped *kundalas*.

Since the snake's feet are invisible,  
it is called the *gudhapada*.  
And your feet are hidden so,  
even Brahma is unable to find them.  
Then, O Kripanidhi,  
how are you different from the snake?

Maybe you'll understand  
if I put it thus:  
The snake is called the *kakodara*  
in all the three worlds,  
When you contain all those three,  
is there not a *kaka*  
contained in your belly?  
O Kripanidhi,  
the snake is *lampata*  
to its *bibara*.  
You too live in the *bibara*.  
The snake is a *lampata* by nature.  
So are you. Moreover  
both of you wear several *patas*.

We know  
that the snake has no ears but eyes.  
And so we call it the *nayanashraba*.  
O lotus-faced one,  
tell me, do you have ears,  
with which to grow angry with me  
when I call you a snake?  
We call the snake the *bhoga*  
and also the *bhogi*.

You are like a snake  
in these two respects.  
You too are a *bhogi*  
for you live in the *mahabhoga*,  
O Kripanidhi!

If you are not a snake,  
why did you do so much harm  
to Kaliya?  
There were so many wicked creatures in Braja.  
But why did you pick him up  
and kill him in your anger?  
Your name is made out of his.  
O Lord,  
if no harm were done to one of your own clan,  
why do you have to carry his name?

Your mother knew this  
right from your childhood and so  
she caught you from under the butter-pot,  
tied you with ropes  
to the tree Jamala  
and without taking any pity on you  
left you there!  
O Kripanidhi,  
you, like a snake, twisted and turned  
so as to digest  
all that you had devoured.  
And all the people in the three worlds,  
must have heard how  
the huge tree was uprooted.

Among Brahma, Shiva and the other great gods  
none but you kept the monopoly of  
the wealth of salvation.  
As you did not save the sinners,  
you appeared to the world  
as a snake.  
The snake devours but the one prey  
that it catches by chance.  
But you, O Kripanidhi,  
have devoured countless spheres of stars and planets!

The snake is called the *ahi*.  
 The one sound 'a' is you,  
 but you are the foe of and harmed  
 such adversaries as Kamsa, O Kripanidhi.  
 When a snake is captured  
 it is put into an earthen pot.  
 You reside in all the *pots* in the world.  
 How can you escape from me  
 except through your wiles?

Has any woman in the world  
 lost her life  
 as a result of breast-feeding a baby?  
 Don't you have it  
 in your divine memory, O Kripanidhi,  
 how you sucked the breath of Putana  
 from her breasts  
 and took away her life?  
 There are hundreds and thousands of witnesses  
 who will bear me out.

Let us see how you will assert,  
 touching your round eyes,  
 that you never walked like a *bhujanga*  
 in the streets of Braja.

It was not from your house  
 but from the far-off Manasarobar  
 came the call of the Nageswara.  
 You couldn't wait even for a while and rushed there.  
 Weren't there hundreds of gods  
 other than you, O Kripanidhi?  
 All snakes are controlled  
 by those who know the *mantras*.  
 You too are responsive to prayers  
 and steadily protect those who pray.  
 Then what are you  
 if not a snake, O Kripanidhi?

Kabisurya says, Lord, don't worry.  
 May you not expose your weaknesses hereafter.  
 I am your servant and so

it doesn't matter if I know.  
 Let not others learn of them.  
 O Kripanidhi,  
 when my end comes  
 you will kindly give me this small gift:  
 You will kindly take me  
 wherever you like  
 away from the precincts of Yama's palace.

*Sarpajanana*, 18-19th century

*Tr.* by Saubhagya Kumar Misra

3

Oh, the Thing is Over

Whatever has happened  
 is a thing of the past.  
 True, but my friend,  
 I tell you all this because  
 my suffering is great.

Your heart is purer than Ganga;  
 and precious is your love for me.  
 Now you tell me  
 how this pain of slipping and falling would go?

He got into my head and drugged me  
 more severely than hemp.  
 Its taste is bitterer than liquid poison  
 and sweeter than nectar.

He turned my being inside out: he,  
 a voice or an arrow?  
 My body was filled with pleasure  
 as and when it reached my ear.

Everything around was swallowed up  
 by the darkness of the blue stone.  
 My senses went numb,  
 and I couldn't be sure  
 if this was my house or a forest.

He came up to me flying  
like the tireless, playful  
blackbird *khanjarita*.  
He entered my being like a bullet  
and drove my conscience away.

Tell me, O moon-faced one,  
if my efforts would be in vain.  
Nobody is around,  
now be frank with me.

Tell me why food so utterly repels me,  
why I've grown so indifferent  
to what I wear, to how I look.  
The ruler of Astadurga<sup>1</sup> says  
what would happen to me  
when the elders of the house  
come to know of all this?

*Galanita Gala Katha*, 18-19th century

Tr. by Saubhagya Kumar Misra

4

What the Fate Does not Do

What doesn't Fate do, my friend!

On the one hand my love is young,  
and my husband is away on the other.  
such is my sad lot.  
what do I do now?

Whatever I had in mind  
didn't happen,  
and what I hadn't did.  
Now the voice of the cuckoo,  
the spring breeze blowing slowly,  
the sweet hum of the bees  
are burning me up.

1.The estate of Athagada.



I am scared of his embraces,  
 for he doesn't allow my necklace  
 to stay on my chest.  
 Now the forests and hills  
 are filled with sweetness.  
 But he is away in Madhupuri  
 forgetting me.

When he is with me, my friend,  
 great is my pleasure.  
 When he bade me farewell and left,  
 why didn't my life follow him,  
 why didn't it end?

When I die,  
 let me not be charged  
 with breach of trust.  
 Now I think of his love  
 and my soul is torn apart.  
 My days and nights don't end.  
 Love has proved so dangerous.

This is what Fate had ordained.  
 Love brought me  
 all this pain and anguish.  
 Hearing these words, says the sad friend  
 the flute-player will return, my dear.  
 So says Harichandán.

*Vidhata ki na karai ge*, 18-19th century

Tr. by Saubhagya Kumar Misra

5

Oh, Pardon Me

Forgive me, O image of the goddess of love,  
 forgive me.  
 I didn't know  
 the princess was going to have a bath.

If a maid or companion  
 had come running and informed me,  
 and I had not heeded her advice

and dared to go towards the pond,  
then all this anger  
would have been justified,  
O narrow-waisted one!

O fair-haired one!  
I didn't know  
you were standing in the water  
surrounded by maids,  
and with all that beauty  
of full, heavy thighs and breasts.

You held the corner of your saree  
between your teeth,  
and faster than lightning  
you ran, your anklets jingling noisy,  
and stopped at the end of the platform  
beautifying it with your presence.

Now that I have learnt a lesson  
I would never repeat  
this mistake, and if I did  
you should destroy me with  
your curses and punishment.  
O lotus-eyed one, O full-bosomed one,  
forgive me for this once.

Hearing Krishna's supplications  
that precious gem of a woman  
was elated and all on a sudden  
made love to him.  
So says the king of Astadurga.

*Kara Khyamare*, 18-19th century

Tr. by Saubhagya Kumar Misra

6

Oh, What Happened

All that happened  
I cannot describe in words:  
Yesterday, from a distance,

my eye fell on  
 the beauty of blue lilies.  
 Among the *keli kadamba* creepers  
 what a blue flame,  
 on the bank of Sun's daughter!  
 My body trembled  
 and was transported to the other bank,  
 to the bank I fear so much.  
 Many an arrow of flowers  
 had he collected  
 in his soft and tender quiver.

I have no shame in confessing  
 that my sole desire then  
 was to make love to him  
 there, standing.  
 With what enchanting playfulness  
 does the beauty of a million moons  
 make up that blue image!  
 I curse the Creator  
 for creating him and thereby  
 making my mother-in-law immortal.

I forgot all habits and customs,  
 all codes of conduct when  
 from inside the grove  
 the sweet notes of his flute  
 came and kissed my ears.

I'm in great pain and anguish!  
 I have no interest in food and sleep.

So says Shri Balukesh the King who is  
 the master of the Sarana world<sup>1</sup>  
 what punishment is this and why,  
 why without love?

*Ki hota re*, 18-19th century

*Tr.* by Saubhagya Kumar Misra

<sup>1</sup> The estate of Athagada or Astadurga.

# When the New Cloud

If the sound of the flute  
of the cloud-dark Shyama  
is heard once at midnight,  
you, my friend, will walk down the forest path,  
in joy, in ecstasy,  
and your wants will be fulfilled.

The intoxicating music of the bees  
and cuckoos  
will flow in the spring breeze.  
and in the hearts of all,  
in the worlds of the still and the moving,  
the seeds of celestial bliss will be sown.

Among the creepers climbing the ashoka trees  
on the bank of Kalinda's daughter,<sup>1</sup>  
canopies of many a sweet and fragrant flower  
will be strung.

We will be surrounding you,  
waiting on you like maids.  
O lakucha<sup>2</sup> breasted one,  
we in joy will watch you walk  
in a regal manner.

The forest will turn into  
a happy abode of love,  
bright with the strength of love-god.  
And the trees of habits and customs,  
O lover par excellence,  
will be cut at the very roots and felled.

We will hold close to our breasts  
his lotus feet, pink-red as the young sun,  
and sing with him.  
All of us, the women of Braja,  
will thus be counted  
among the lucky and the great.

1. The river Yamuna.  
2. Hard-shelled fruit.

O bright-toothed one,  
 says the master of Astadurga,  
 the stream of the nectar of love  
 flowing from his and our hearts,  
 will look as though washed  
 with the beams of the Baishakha<sup>1</sup> full moon.

*Jebe Nabaghana*, 18-19th century

*Tr.* by Saubhagya Kumar Misra

8

Nothing Pleases Me, My Friend

Nothing pleases me, my friend,  
 nothing satisfies,  
 Tell me what I should do;  
 how I would earn his love;  
 how I would give it up,  
 the love of the cloud-blue Shyama.  
 A moment feels like a long aeon.  
 How do I hold on?  
 Why did the dangerous notes of his flute—  
 the Joy of the Three Worlds—  
 kiss my ears, my friend?

He is the most beautiful of all,  
 the most playful elephant,  
 as blue as an emerald door.  
 Should I go on thinking about him,  
 pining for him,  
 and thus lose  
 my sense of habits and customs?

Or, maybe I should swallow poison  
 and worship Yama<sup>2</sup>, the sun-god's son,  
 Or having and being in Shyama's company  
 I would hoist the banner of glory  
 as the luckiest of all women in the world.

1. April-May

2. The god of death.

Then I would hold in my lap  
that handsome young boy  
and play with him among the trees.  
I don't trust that saw of the love-god.  
Would I be able to protect myself?

The King Shri Chhotray says:  
after reflecting his moon-like face  
for once in her blue-lotus eyes,  
she would own her sin  
as the decree of fate.

*Kahi re mana sahi*, 18-19th century

Tr. by Saubhagya Kumar Misra

9

It's a Shame to Say

I feel so shy to tell you,  
my friend,  
all that happened today.

He was asleep, I didn't know,  
and so I started playing the Vina  
lovingly, attentively,  
He, my handsome master, came up  
and planted a kiss on my cheek,  
all praise for my skill.  
The moment was more painful than that of death.  
My grip loosened and the veena  
fell from my hand,  
and the flower in my hair felt  
as heavy as a mountain,  
I couldn't lift my head.  
And then and there did the five-arrowed archer<sup>1</sup>, that rascal,  
attack and hurt me.

He kissed me all over my body.  
I was in ecstasy.  
My senses were electrified  
again and again.  
He wouldn't free me  
from his tight embrace;

1. The god of love.

how would I get out  
and away from it all?

Why did I suffer so much?  
see what troubles my shyness  
has caused me.  
I wonder how women crave the pleasure  
of making love  
in the reverse position.  
So says the king of Jalantara<sup>1</sup> :  
even if I have to lose  
one of my parts for ever,  
I don't mind, but I promise I'll never practise music  
that troublesome, sinful art.

*Kahibaku Laja*, 18th-19th century

Tr. by Saubhagya Kumar Misra

## Four Lyrics

### JADUMANI MOHAPATRA

JADUMANI MOHAPATRA (Yadumani Mohapātra, 1781-1860) was born at Athagard in Ganjam district, and subsequently settled at Itamati, near Nayagard. He is famous for his sharp intelligence, vivid humour and satire, and quick poetic powers. His two well-known Kavyas are, *Prabandha Purna Chandra* and *Raghav Bilas* written in rich, ornate, rhetorical style in the tradition of Upendra Bhanja and Abhimanyu Samantsinhara.

The pieces given here are his short lyrics, dealing with love, addressed to his wife Khanjana.

### 1

#### O Lady, Forever Young

O, heavy-breasted one,  
The source of all pleasures,  
You are ever young  
Forever youthful.  
You are the crown jewel  
Of all the wonderful women,  
I always bow at your feet,

1. The landlord of the Jalantara estate.

As delicate as lotus.  
 You are the treasure of all beauty  
 You are so adept at love-making.  
 Being so full of grace,  
 Your dark clothes cover me  
 Like clouds covering the sky.  
 O beautiful one,  
 The fit paramour of Lord Vishnu,  
 You garlanded me,  
 Took me as your lover.  
 And all my sorrows vanished.  
 You are neither tall nor short,  
 Your eyes are restless.  
 Like the restless *khanjana* bird,  
 There is none else  
 As beautiful as you,  
 O your red lips,  
 Your bird-like eyes,  
 You are the greatest source of pleasure for me.

You are the sea of mercy,  
 You are the mine of pleasure,  
 You are skilled in sixtyfour arts  
 Your patience always takes me so lovingly.  
 O my Khanjana, I am your slave,  
 Let your music fill me,  
 I am like fish in the sea,  
 And you like the sky above,  
 I long for you, O lady,  
 You are my greatest pleasure.

*Payadhara Re*, 18-19th century

Tr. by J.M. Mohanty

2

What Did I Do

Oh pity, what did I do!  
 I lost my sense knowingly.  
 The lady had flowers all over;  
 Her every word dropped nectar,  
 And she pleaded so much  
 Not to leave her;



The gem of a woman she was  
 She observed all penances for me,  
 And her hair-do was so unique  
 So extraordinary,  
 I don't know how I left her alone,  
 Left her alone and went afar.  
 Calamities came,  
 Quick and thick,  
 I could not be careful,  
 A great pity, I could not spend the night  
 With my lady in my lap,  
 How I left her, where, Oh!

Thus says Jadumani,  
 She who talks to me  
 On seeing me, happily,  
 I kept her away  
 That diamond of a woman,  
 The woman who takes my sorrows away.

*Aha ki Karma Kali*, 18-19th century

*Tr.* by J.M.Mohanty

3

O my Heavy-breasted One

O my heavy-breasted one,  
 How I long for you!  
 The weapons of her eyes pierced me  
 And my life burnt unceasingly;  
 She turned her moonlike face and smiled,  
 I could not walk, I swooned!  
 How could I know  
 What affections she had for me?  
 What greed of a miser?

Thus says the poet,  
 I can't say  
 What the god of love did to me.

*Sancha Ghancha Ucha Pibaruraja*, 18-19th century

*Tr.* by J.M.Mohanty

### Is He a Lover?

Would you call him a lover  
 Who has never tasted the drink of love?  
 He may be as rich as king Indra,  
 Might have enough wealth, position,  
 But if he has no lady, clever and witty,  
 No woman skilled in love,  
 He has nothing  
 No wealth, no luck.  
 The youthful lady breaks a Yogi's penances;  
 She is for amorous pleasure,  
 She cures the heat of love,  
 He is foolish who does not know this.  
 She smiles so sweetly,  
 Her face shines so happily,  
 He who has not seen it is blind,  
 Even though he has eyes  
 As fresh as a lotus.

Thus says the poet,  
 If you have enough luck.  
 If Goddess Bhagabati blesses you,  
 You will get the Beauty  
 And her love.

*Seki Rasikara Gana Re*, 18-19th century

Tr. by J.M. Mohanty

### Selections

#### GOPALAKRISHNA PATTANAYAK

GOPALAKRISHNA PATTANAYAK (1784-1862) was born in a respected Vaishnab family of Paralakhemundi, presently the head-quarters of Gajapati district. He, like his father Banabasi, was a high official in the then royal court of Paralakhemundi.

He had written hundreds of poems on the love-story of Radha and Krishna, which continue to be immensely popular because of their lyrical quality, melodious language, poetic imagination and craftsmanship. In Odissi dance, his poems rival those of Jayadeva in the potential for the Abhinaya.

## 1

## The Love Affair

One who has fallen in love knows;  
 Does one believe in it if spoken to ?  
 Each listening to the other, resulting in greed for more,  
 the body is smitten by the arrow of flowers.  
 Looking at each other for an instant  
 is not possible for the eyes  
 when flowing in constant pining.  
 The bodies do not come together  
 but appear to mingle with one another,  
 When looked at, caught in the corner of the eye.  
 Muted in an instant  
     discarding all ego  
 follows Duty wherever she goes.  
 Whoever wants to speak  
     Signalling to a secret corner,  
 the body trembles in the mirror,  
     says Gopalakrishna,  
 discarding all pretentions.  
     They consider the enemies as friends.

*Preeti Prasanga* 18-19th century

*Tr.* by D.P. Pattanaik

## 2

## This Rainy Day

How will my friend spend this rainy day alone ?  
 God has made us suffer so much.  
 Hearing the croak of frogs and the call of the peacock,  
 moving from one disaster to another,  
 how heart-broken would he be,  
 O my dear companion !

Look at the sparkling lightning,  
 the intoxicated black-bee humming,  
 the wind blowing through the malati bower,  
 and the calling of the grasshopper.

When my jewel of a friend sought permission to leave  
I forbade him time and again  
holding his hand in mine.

Holding tears in the eyes, turning around to see  
the heart does not burst  
remembering the handsome image.

To my Gopalakrishna, O Shankar, from the pain of separation  
save this one time;  
I bow at your feet.

*E Ghana Dina*, 18-19th century

Tr. by D.P. Pattanaik

3

### Yesterday, Going to Fetch Water

While going to fetch water from Jamuna,  
I got the fruit of my action, O Sangata:  
When I looked at the *kadamba* bower, O Sangata,  
A cloud or the blue gem image was it.  
I could not distinguish, O Sangata.

The dense smell of blue lotus and musk  
was coming in torrents, O Sangata  
I became senseless, O Sangata.

Behind him the excited peacocks raising their plume  
calling and dancing, O Sangata  
Why did they do so? O Sangata.

Hiding under the creeper  
He reached me suddenly, O Sangata;  
In what terrific speed, O Sangata !

Hearing the tinkling sound hither and thither  
I looked pausing, O Sangata  
He said there is none, O Sangata !

Having a glimpse of him I was shocked  
My heart beat faster, O Sangata  
I bowed my head, O Sangata !

The moving edges of hair and the side-burns  
Swinging and playing, O Sangata  
The ear-rings on the cheek, O Sangata.

Trembling and shivering I lost conscious  
I felt feverish, O Sangata  
My body was wet with sweat, O Sangata.

In every pore I felt sensation  
I wanted to make haste, O Sangata  
My feet were transfixed, O Sangata.

Teeth like seeds of pomegranate, so saying he spread his hands  
I was trying to say something, O Sangata  
My voice was silenced, O Sangata.

Whether the erotic emotion or the love-god, the fountain love  
Suddenly I was called, O Sangata,  
By the old and crooked woman, Jatila, O Sangata.

While returning home I asked,  
Says Gopalakrishna, O Sangata  
He is the moon of Braj, O Sangata.

*Jala Ani Jai Kali*, 18-19th century

Tr. by D.P. Pattanaik

4

Today, in the House of the King of Braja

Today in the house of the king of Braja I sank in shame, Mother.  
With Rohini I was in the kitchen  
I was sighted by the greatest of lovers, Mother !

My heart palpitated, my wisdom was lost  
I bathed in nectar like water of the springs, Mother !  
Crooked Kundaballi left me alone,  
I put the veil when the parakeet called, Mother !  
Is the cooking over, when he asked thus  
My sensibility lost, I found no answer, Mother !  
Looking at my trembling lips he smiled at me  
Knowing its implications he kissed me, Mother !  
Said Gopalakrishna, Jatila materialised  
How much I looked for you friend, Mother !

*Aja Brajarajapure*, 18-19th century

Tr. by D.P. Pattanaik

5

What Catastrophe

What problems have befallen, Mother ?  
Shyama did not leave me for an instant, Mother !

The same wild-boar gait, the same dancing dress :  
it afflicted me wherever I went, Mother !

The amount of qureel that peacock-plumed one  
Unabashed, he bowed with folded hands, mother!

In anger I bit my lips, I hit with the edge of my pleat,  
He embraced me laughing, Mother !

Nobody knew which way he came before I arrived  
He was sleeping in my bed, Mother !

Says Gopalakrishna, listen, O Princess Brushabhanu,  
The mind is dipped in that ocean of love, Mother !

*E Ke Paramada*, 18-19th century

*Tr.* by D.P. Pattanaik

6

"I was Saying No...No..."

I was saying no...no  
Where did you bring me ?

Asking me to go bathing, tricking me into a snare  
You brought me face to face with moon of Braja.

Whose beauty has won that of the love-god,  
it charms the one devoted to her husband.

What adversity has befallen, I have lost all sensibilities;  
look at his side-long glances.

If somebody sees this that will be the end of my world;  
save me when he comes near.

Looking hither and thither, Shyama embraced me  
and took me away, says Gopalakrishna.

*Karuthili Mu Nahinahire*, 18-19th century

*Tr.* by D.P. Pattanaik

## 7

## Why Did You Get Up So Early ?

"Why did you get up so early, O property of the poor ?  
 Will you not let me churn the butter-milk ?  
 You forgot your health; you did not sleep;  
 Why have you become so wicked ?  
 You will play with Rama at day-break;  
 I will put you to sleep with a song.  
 How shall I churn, when my hands leave the churning rod.  
 feeding you the cream ?  
 What a trouble you are ! Do not obstruct my feet;  
 go and call brother Rama."  
 Putting her hands in the churning pot and taking out butter,  
 she says, "Have you gone mad ?  
 Why are you sucking the empty hand ? Why are you dancing ?  
 You will grow thin; do not look at your shadow.  
 Do I drop the house-work at hand and sit along,  
 holding you in my arm pitday and night ?  
 She dusted his face with the saree border and kissed,  
 Gopal Krishna thinks of both.

*Uthilu Ede Begi*, 18-19th century

Tr. by D.P. Pattanaik

## 8

## Krishna, My Moon

There is none to compare with Krishna, my moon,  
 My wish-fulfilling jewel, ornament of the three worlds,  
 The only child of the sorrowful, the property of the  
 poor, is my Shri Hari  
 The side-burns soaked in sweat,  
 The marks on the forehead erased,  
 Having breast-fed him and wiping the face with a towel,  
 The queen of Braja said:  
 "My son, show the beauty of your face  
 To your mother's brother's wife.  
 See, he has not eaten anything;  
 His empty belly is giving pain;  
 In my stupidity I was enaged in house-work.

Having received your blessings  
 Let him live long:"  
 So saying she kissed him on the mouth  
 holding him in her arms.  
 "Where had you been? You did not remember me,"  
 says Gopalakrishna, he had forgotten himself in sports.

*Mo Krishna Chandrama*, 18-19th century

*Tr.* by D.P. Pattanaik

9

The Nectar Plate

I have poured nectar into my own hands, O my bosom friend;  
 Fie upon me, I did not consider  
 I drank poison, thinking it pride.  
 With tears in his eyes, my beautiful black one  
 held out his cloth, silencing me.  
 Having surrendered my pride, I have nothing left.  
 I did not look at him, even though asked.  
 Even if it was Vajra, it would have liquified.  
 I tolerated his pain.  
 On the banks of the Kalindi lake an hour back  
 I heard Gopalakrishna had witnessed it.

*Piyusha Thali*, 18-19th century

*Tr.* by D.P. Pattanaik



# Medieval Punjabi Literature

## Thirty-Eight Poems

SHEIKH FARID

SHEIKH FARID (Seik Farid, 1173-1265) or Farid-ud-Masood was born in Khotwal as the son of Sheikh Jamal-ud-Din Suleiman and Kulsum Bibi. He went to Multan for higher studies. Hazrat Qutb-ud-Farid-Din Bakhtiar Kaki took him to Delhi, where through penance and suffering he grew into a great poet. In the 16th century Guru Nanak collected Farid's poems and put them in Adi Granth. Love of God is the central theme of all his verses. He was one of the very great Sufi Poets of Punjabi.

Thirty-eight of his compositions are given below.

1

The day the maid is pledged to be married,  
Determined becomes the time of her wedding.  
The Angel of Death, heard of for long,  
Shows up, without doubt, at last.  
Cracking the bones,  
He'll draw the frail life out.  
Be assured, his writ is averted not.

The Soul is the Bride and Death the Groom,  
Who, verily, shall carry her away.  
Having said "Farewell" to all her known,  
Upon whose shoulders shall she weep?  
Finer than a hair, indeed,  
Is the Bridge across the River of Death.  
Says Farid: Your grave is beckoning you ever.  
Don't idly stand, and ensure being robbed.

2

Perplexed, amazed, bewildered am I  
This world a hidden fire is.

Gracious has been my Lord to me;  
Else, I'd have been consumed by it.

3

Farid, had I known, the grain of life is scant.  
A sparing handful would I have ta'en  
Had I known, under-age is my groom,  
Scant should I have my pride shown.

4

Had I known my cloak would crumble and fall,  
Fast would I have tied the knot.  
Many times over, the world I've scanned,  
None dear as you have I found, my Lord!

5

Should you a rare intellect possess,  
With it write not an evil draft.  
Instead, just lower your head and peep  
Within, and check what's in your heart.

6

If they should strike you hard with blows,  
Do not return them blow for blow.  
In utter humility kiss their feet,  
Before you leave to homeward go.

7

Farid, when it was time for you to earn merit,  
You, with this world, remained engrossed.  
Now that Death is digging your grave,  
Certes you in it shall be tossed.

8

Farid, have you noticed the change that's come?  
This your beard has all gone grey.

The journey of life is about to end  
And the past's been left far, far away.

## 9

Farid, the eyes have weakened by looking at things,  
And the ears, by hearing, have their prowess lost.  
Look at the stalk, 'tis about to ripen,  
Its colour is, certes, changing fast.

## 10

Those who woo'd not the Lord when sable was their hair,  
How shall they, when it turns grey?  
Oh, give your heart and your love to the Lord,  
While the youth in your limbs is virgin still !

## 11

Do not belittle the Dust, O Farid!  
No one equals its worth, indeed.  
While we live, 'tis under our feet;  
And over our head, when we are dead.

## 12

I wandered far with my tiny legs  
O'er plain and mountain high;  
But today, it seems, is miles away  
The jug that at hand doth lie.

## 13

Slushy are the lanes, and far off His House,  
And my love for my Lord is fast.  
If I wade thro' the rain, I wet my cloak,  
Should I tarry, I'll just prove false.

## 14

Tonight I slept not with my Love,  
My limbs, with pain they writhe.

O go and ask the love-forsaken,  
How they pass their nights.

15

Why should I fear my youth will pass,  
If I lose not your love, O' my Lord.  
How many beauties have withered away  
That remained by love unsought!

16

Sheikh Farid has aged grown,  
His limbs they tremble and quiver.  
But e'en if he lived a hundred years,  
His body into dust shall shrivel.

17

Give me not to hang on another's door,  
My Lord, I earnestly pray.  
Than keep me in such state, O Lord,  
Pray, take my life away.

18

Some o' the folks have surplus flour,  
While others have not e'en salt.  
But all in the hereafter shall be judged,  
And punished whoever is at fault.

19

Your cloak may be mended again and again  
But life not a stitch would take.  
When come their turn, they'll all depart,  
Be they the wise or the pious or the great!

20

While your two lamps fully lit they stood,  
Death came, and alighted in your camp.

He took your fort, and robbed your soul,  
And blew off both your lamps.

21

How long shall you jump and dance on the roof  
Unmindful of the Lord?  
Numbered are the days allotted, dear,  
And sliding away they are!

22

Of mansions and pavilions  
Why must you ever be fond?  
These are but heaps of dust  
Of no use in the Yond!

23

The works that won't any merit bring,  
Forget about them all.  
Lest shame-faced you have to stand  
In the Court of the Supreme Lord.

24

Engage yourself in the service o' the Lord,  
From every doubt be free.  
Dervishes should, indeed, cultivate  
The endurance of a tree.

25

Farid, my robes are sombre-coloured,  
And black also my dress.  
Burdened with sinfulness I wander  
But people call me a dervish.

26

By water-logging if withered, a crop,  
Will never by watering grow.

One who is widowed of the Lord,  
Will only pine and mourn.

27

Eager was she as a virgin;  
When wed, concerns began.  
Now her grief is only this:  
She can't be a virgin again.

28

O dog of a Farid, why neglect your prayer?  
This scarce is the right way.  
You must, indeed, visit the mosque  
Full five times a day.

29

You turn your mind into a plain;  
Level out all ups and downs,  
Lest in the blazing fires of Hell  
You may, O Farid, be thrown.

30

Return you good for evil ever;  
Allow no ill-will into your heart.  
Then free of sickness your body'll be,  
You'll get what you would ask.

31

Corrode not your banks, O river!  
You too have to render account.  
The stream can only take that course  
Which the Lord does it command.

32

O do not pick this skeleton, O crow,  
Make haste and fly away.  
Don't peck any flesh from this frame  
In which my love does stay.

33

Furnish yourself to meet with me,  
 Meet me and comfort find.  
 If you learn to live to be just mine,  
 The whole world shall be yours.

34

The season has changed, the forest quivers,  
 The leaves, they dry and fall.  
 All the quarters have I ransacked,  
 Nowhere does permanence prevail.

35

All the hearts are gems indeed.  
 To break a heart is an evil tort.  
 Should you long for your Beloved,  
 Never, never break a heart!

36

I wring my hands and in anguish I burn,  
 With passionate frenzy my spouse I seek,  
 You, O my love, with me have taken offence;  
 I am blameworthy, You were most discrete.  
 Of my love's true worth was I ignorant.  
 My youth's departed, I am penitant.  
 "O sable-winged cuckoo how come you're so black?"  
 "The sorrow o' separation singed my wings alas !"  
 What comfort if one is parted from one's Spouse?  
 With Him can she reunite but through His Grace.  
 In a desolate well I lie, a desolate dame !  
 By friends and comrades alike am I forsa'en.  
 Me, O my Lord, to holy company bind.  
 As I look around, my friend, but you I find.  
 Our path is beset with much sorrow and grief;  
 'Tis sharper than a sword and narrow to the extreme.  
 On this very path is e'er confined my beat.  
 At the break of dawn you shall depart, Farid !

37

They alone are devotees true  
 Who flinch not from the Lord;  
 And inconstant are those  
 Whose words belie their thought.  
 They who are imbued with His Love  
 Revel in His vision ever;  
 And they a burden on this earth are  
 Who Him remember never.  
 They alone are dervishes true  
 Who in the Lord have stilled.  
 Blessed, indeed, is mother theirs  
 And life theirs fulfilled.  
 You are, O Lord, sustainer ours,  
 Unfathomable indeed.  
 Thoses who have realized You,  
 I humbly kiss their feet.  
 O my ever-forgiving Lord,  
 Your refuge do I seek.  
 The gift of your worship, O Lord,  
 Then, grant to Sheikh Farid.

38

When 't was time, I did not build my boat.  
 Now that the tide is high, 'tis hard to ferry a float.  
 Touch not the sun-flower, friends, 't will you brand.  
 My soul is atremble, for stern is the Master's command.  
 As milk won't go back to milched udders,  
 So never does life reunion take..  
 Says Farid, "O hark, my mates,  
 The Lord on time His call shall make;  
 Reluctantly, away the swan shall fly  
 And leave in dust its tenement to lie.

*Shalok te Shabad*, 12th-13th century

Tr. by J. S. Neki

## Nanak Says

GURU NANAK DEV

GURU NANAK DEV (Guru Nānak Dev, 1469-1539) is undoubtedly the all-time greatest writer in Punjabi. His writings naturally form the core of *Guru Granth*. As the first preceptor of the Sikh religion, he has been the greatest single influence on Punjabi



literature till date. Born on 16 April 1469 in the village of Talwandi Rai Boi, later called Nankana Sahib, near Lahore, as the son of Kallian Rai, Nanak was taught in his early days by the village Brahmin and the village Qazi. After his marriage he took up the job of a store-keeper, but soon gave it up to become a man of God, renouncing married life too. In the last years of his life he settled down at Kartarpur where he breathed his last at the age of 70.

Guru Nanak's poems belong to different genres such as the lyrical *padas* and the philosophical *vars*; in the *Granth Saheb* the compositions are arranged under different *ragas*. He also uses several forms of folk songs. His writings are devotional in tone and religious in content and all these are marked by a high moral concern. Social criticism and mystical experience are also very much in evidence in his writings.

Thirty-five of his compositions are given below.

# 1

He was in the very Beginning,  
Existed when times began;  
Exists He, verily, now,  
And, in truth, shall always be.

God isn't discovered by thinking  
By a million brains;  
The din of mind is stilled not,  
Howso one quiet remains,  
By lords of worldly pleasures  
No craving doth accloy.  
Of a million wits and wisdoms  
Not one can one deploy.  
How, then, can truth be sighted?  
How rend the falsehood-veil?  
By following his will, O Nanak,  
That, certes, doth prevail.

# 2

His will the worlds created,  
Ineffable is His will.  
His will is life-infusing  
With plaudit doth it fill,  
He makes us low and lofty  
And writes our pleasure and pain,  
On some His Grace descends

Some He gyrates again,  
All under His Law are captive  
None ever from it may bolt.  
Whoso this will discern  
His "self" he shan't uphold.

3

Make Chastity the smithy and Poise the smith,  
Use tools of knowledge and anvil of mind,  
The fire of austerity and bellows of fear,  
In the crucible of love melt gold Nectarine,  
In such true Mint the word is moulded.  
Whoever is blest acts forth in grace,  
Verily, then, the divine Glance gracious  
Blesses him and lifts up his face.

4

Air is the Guru, and water the Sire,  
And earth, the Master Great,  
Day and night are the mirrors twain  
And the whole world but a fete.  
And all our actions good and bad  
The lord of Law doth weigh,  
'Tis these that draw us near Him  
Or push us far away.  
For those who dwelt on His Holy Name,  
For good, the toil is o'er  
And Glory-lit they themselves are  
And save a myriad more.

5

Salver the Heavens, and lamps the sun and moon  
The stars are jewels in the Salver strewn  
Mountain breezes the incense burn  
Softly the winds do fly-whisk turn  
The blossomy greens Your offerings are  
O You light of lights (afar) !  
Wonderful is your worship blithe  
O You great annuller of Fright  
Unstruck melody, Your drum and fife.

Thousands Your eyes, yet not one eye;  
 Thousands Your forms, yet not one form  
 Thousands Your feet, yet not one foot,  
 Sans olfaction You odours sense.  
 Thus have you, Lord,  
 Bewitched my heart!  
 'Tis Your light that lights all minds,  
 Your effulgence forever doth shine.  
 The Guru's bidding Your testament is,  
 What You accept is worship Yours.  
 I yearn for the Dew of Your Lotus feet  
 My thirst unslated night and day  
 Grant to this *chatrika* a drop O' Your grace,  
 And in Your Name grant him to stay.

## 6

Were my palace with pearls erected  
 With gems were it inlaid;  
 And plastered with musk and saffron  
 And *agar* and sandal paste;  
 Would I then lose my balance  
 And , Lord, forget Your name ?  
 Put into fire my soul and body  
 Should I without You be,  
 I asked of the Guru and he told me ;  
 No shelter there is but You!

If my ground were studded with diamonds  
 And with rubies my bedstead strung;  
 Damsels resplendent with beauty  
 Were to lure me in dalliance;  
 Heavens forbid that I forget You  
 And remember not Your Name.

Were I a *siddha* adept,  
 And miracles able to ply,  
 Now hiding, now revealing  
 Myself to the watching eye,  
 Were I to be by people  
 Ranked up and regarded high.  
 Heavens forbid that I forget You.

And remember not Your Name.  
Were I to be a potentate  
With force, and arms and fleet  
And everywhere should run my writ  
On a throne I set my feet.  
Heavens forbid I forget You  
And remember not Your Name.

## 7

If aeons were to be my age  
And air my food and fare;  
And I caged myself in a cave  
Where sun and moon won't dare;  
If even in a dream could I  
Be able all my sleep to spare;  
I'd still not be able to fathom You  
Nor know the worth of Your Name.

He, the Lord, is seated in Himself  
Of his Merit I've only heard.  
If He were only merciful  
And gave me a yearning will  
Were I to be pressed like a reed-mate,  
Or ground like grain in a mill,  
Were I to be burnt in fire  
And reduced to ashes, still  
I would not be able to fathom You  
Nor know the worth of Your Name

Were I a bird of the heavens  
And trailed across the Vault,  
Had I become invisible  
Nor eat nor drink at all.  
I'd still not be able to fathom You  
Nor know the worth of Your Name.

Had I read heaps of paper  
And knew their hidden intent  
With the ocean of ink did I write  
With the speed of a wailing wind.  
I'd still not be able to fathom You  
Nor know the worth of Your Name.

## 8

Accountable are we for what we speak  
 Accountable too for what we eat  
 Or walk or hear or see  
 Accountable even for the breath we breathe  
 Why ask the wise?—'tis plain!

O Friend! this world is *maya's* glare.  
 When man purblind forgets the Name,  
 He's neither here nor there!  
 This life, it verily ends in death,  
 And death devours all;  
 But there where all accounts are settled,  
 No one shall be our pal.  
 And all mourning is but in vain.

All say, He is the greatest o' the great,  
 But how great?—none can answer.  
 And words, they can exalt him not  
 The Lord is the One True Master.  
 With creatures brings the world mundane,

The lowest of the lowly, and  
 And loveliest of the lowest born  
 Nanak would their comrade be,  
 Would envy not the great.  
 Wheresoever the poor are served  
 There Your mercies rain!

## 9

How fortunate, that I was saved  
 And the Ego in me was tamed.  
 As I placed my trust in the Guru,  
 E'ven Evil my slave became.  
 My worries, the noise of my reason,  
 I abandoned all.  
 And went after my care-free Lord.  
 O my mind, if truth you find  
 Will all your fears depart!  
 But fear the Fearless, and fears dispel  
 And in His Word, like godmen, dwell !

How do we praise Him, we fathom him not,  
Innumerable his solicitors are  
And He alone who gives to all.  
When He Himself in our hearts dwells  
Real joy in our being swells.

This world is but a dream, a play,  
In one instant it withers away.  
They meet Him who are so obliged.  
The alienated, they shrink.  
Whatever He wills 'tis that shall be,

Who else can do a thing?  
Godmen commerce in true merchandise  
The dealers in Truth the Guru glorifies.  
Says Nanak: whoso shall truth transact,  
The Lord his wares would sure accept.

10

Accused of duality is the Bride  
Who loves one other than her Lord..  
A wall of crumbling mudsalt continually crumbling to fall!  
No joy without the holy word is found.  
Without the Lord,  
Grief won't depart.

Why deck Yourself, deluded woman,  
If amiss with you is your Lord,

Here will you find no comfort ,  
Hereafter, no discharge,  
Neglectful is not the True Cultivator,  
Prepares the soil 'fore sowing His Name,  
The crop of Treasures Nine doth sprout  
And the mark of Grace it doth obtain.  
One who knows not the guru, what culture can he claim?  
The egoist blind walks in the dark if he neglects the Name.

His transmigration ceases not,  
He comes and goes, and in ruin ends..  
If a bride decked with sandalwood and saffron,

Vermilion applied to the parting of her hair  
 And chews betel leaf with fragrance rare,  
 On her brow applies *chandan*-paste  
 But if the Lord isn't pleased with her,  
 All her decking and pranking go waste,  
 All her joys and pleasures are empty.  
 If one's heart is devoid of the Name,  
 One finds not approval at the Lord's Court.  
 Says Nanak : Blessed is the Bride who loveth her Lord.

## 11

Hark my friend, now is the time to meet the Lord.  
 Only while you're young, and breathe, would your life last.  
 Of what use would it be without merit?  
 For dust will dust inherit  
 O my mind, then, profit earn  
 And home return!

Hear we tales and read and write much to know  
 But day by day,  
 desire swells; ego and evil grow.  
 God unknowable can't be sized,  
 But through the Guru, He is realized,  
 A million feats of cleverness and intimacies with men  
 Without the holy company come not to fulfilment.  
 O my mind, without His Name, you'll verily burn in grief.  
 Dote on the Lord, and know yourself and Freedom claim.  
 By my mind I've sold myself to the Guru  
 My head and heart I have surrendered to him too,  
 Over the three worlds have I searched  
 Whom I seek, Him have I found..  
 The Guru did grant me union with the Lord.

## 12

Why should I fear death?  
 Why for life must I crave?  
 'Tis You my Lord, who all Your creatures save,  
 If only You will, we breathe and morsel take  
 Within us be You lodged, O Lord, through the Guru's Grace.  
 And cast us in whatever would that pleaseth You!

13

Himself the Essence, Himself the Connoisseur,  
Of pleasures, the Enjoyer Himself;  
Himself the Bride, the Bridal gown,  
The Spouse with her in the bed Himself.  
He pervades the Universe dyed in delight.

Himself the fisher, the fish, water and net,  
Himself the bead and the jewel (in the fish)  
O sisters of my soul! My beloved is a many-splendoured love  
The happily-wedded ones delight in Him  
But see how wretched I am!  
Prays Nanak: You, O Lord, are the lake,  
The swan, the lotus, and the mighty bloom.  
'Tis You who beauty view and take delight.

14

All creatures with selfsame consciousness are endowed.  
And of it, none has been deprived.  
As their intent, so is their path,  
And for its sake they come and go.  
O my mind! Why indulge in craft?  
His reckoning and His reward! Brook no delay.

Your creatures are Yours, and You are theirs,  
Wherefore, then, do You get enraged?  
When they are Yours and You are theirs?  
And You do weigh them in Your Grace,  
If deeds are noble, wisdom is fullsome,  
Where deeds lack goodness, mind is little.  
Prays Nanak:  
How doth a man of wisdom present?  
He's the one who doth realize himself  
And his God  
By the Guru's Grace he buckles up his thoughts  
And, indeed, is approved by the Lord.

15

You are the ocean of wisdom and vision clear  
How may I, a fish, Your infinity scan?



Wherever I cast my gaze, there You I behold,  
 Removed from You I gasp and explode.  
 I know not the fisher, nor e'en the net,  
 But in distress You I call,  
 You pervade all, but I reckoned You far.  
 Whatso I do, 'fore You does it lie.  
 You watch me; I tend to deny.  
 Neither am I of any use, nor live I in Your Name.  
 Whatso You give me, that's what I consume.  
 No other door there is that I may knock at.  
 Nanak this one supplication makes:  
 My life and my body in Your Love be cast,  
 Himself he's near, Himself is far  
 Himself in the middle as well.  
 Himself he watches, Himself he hears,  
 Himself he createth all.  
 Whatever doth please Him,  
 That may I accept!

## 16

O my mind! Bear such love for Your Lord  
 As for water the lotus has.  
 Tossed, by the waves although,  
 Yet, in love, it blooms.  
 The Creatures born in water  
 Without it perish fast.

O my mind! How may You be saved without love?  
 The Lord pervades the hearts of Godmen,  
 Whom with stores of devotion He blesseth.

O my mind! Love Your Lord as the fish loves water..  
 The deeper the water, the greater his gladness;  
 Mind and body become serene.  
 Without water it survives not a moment  
 Only his Lord knoweth his pangs.

O my mind! Love Your Lord as the *Chatrik* loves the rain.  
 He longs not for brimming lakes nor for lush plains.  
 He waits for one rain-drop and that is all  
 Through Grace will that be obtained  
 And the deeds govern the fruit.

O my Mind ! Love Your Lord as water loveth milk.  
 Itself it boils but lets not milk evaporate.  
 Union and separation, the lord himself ordains.  
 And elevates us through truth.

O my mind! Love Your Lord as *chakor* loves the sun.  
 It slumbers not even for a moment.  
 The distant sun it reckons as at hand  
 The self-willed know this not.  
 The God-oriented consider Him present ever.  
 The egoist, with calculation, busies himself.  
 Whatso the Creator wills, that alone happens,  
 His worth can scarce be reckoned  
 Even if the whole world tries.  
 By the Guru's guidance is He obtained.  
 Truth obtains and bliss prevails.  
 True love perishes not if one meets the true Guru.  
 Thus are obtained illumination and the secret of the three worlds.  
 The Immaculate Name must not be forgotten,  
 Should one be a seeker of Truth.

Gone are the birds (with their pranks)  
 Who perched on the banks of the pool.  
 A brief moment and then they depart..  
 The play is but for a day or two.  
 Those favoured by You, O Lord, are united to You.  
 They alone win the game.

Without the Guru, love springs not  
 Nor is the dirt of egoism removed.  
 Pierced by the holy Word is one satiated,  
 And cries out "I am He."  
 Through the Guru's guidance one knows oneself,  
 No other effort whatso avails.  
 Those already united cannot be united further,  
 The word their satisfaction remains  
 The egoist tosses about;  
 He finds no rest even by mistake.  
 Says Nanak: His is the Door, His the Home,  
 There's no other place for us.

## 17

Beauteous are Your eyes, sparkling Your teeth.  
 Sharp Your Nose, luxurious Your tresses  
 Splendent is Your frame cast in gold.  
 Multiform indeed is Your body.  
 You hold a Rosary like that of Krishna.

O sisters of my soul ! On His Name,  
 Hark you His counsel that You should not face *Yama*.  
 Thus shall the impure mind be cleaned,  
 And discrimination arise between a crane and a swan.  
 O beauteous are His Eyes, sparkling His Teeth!

Graceful is Your Gait, Sweet Your Utterance  
 Titillating is your Youth Self-absorbed, fulfilling desires  
 Your measured steps like those of an elephant.  
 Self-bedecked,  
 One intoxicated with such love of the Lord Divine  
 Floweth pure as Ganga  
 Prays Nanak: I am Your slave.  
 O' You with a graceful Gait and Utterance Sweet.

## 18

Lovely is the spring in *chet* with black-bees sure bedecked.  
 The forests are in full bloom, I stand in wait for my Love.  
 How can the woman find comfort, if the spouse has not come home?  
 The pangs of separation torment her, each limb and every bone.  
 While the Cuckoo on the mango tree sings, how can I contain my pain?  
 In this my death-like life, how can I remain?  
 Says Nanak: In *chet* should the spouse arrive,  
 The Bride would bask in spontaneous delight.

## 19

Beautiful is *Vaishakh*, the woods new vestures wear.  
 The woman awaits at her gate: "Take pity and come home dear!  
 Come home my love, and ferry me through impassable brine.  
 Without You, O my Lord, I ain't worth half a dime,  
 But priceless would become if I Your favour find,  
 O who doth see my love, me too make him see?

I know you are not far, instead you sojourn in me.  
Says Nanak: In *Vaishakh* he alone this favour finds  
Whom to his word with Faith inclines.

20

Blessed is the month of *Jeth*; why should my Lord I forget?  
While the plains, like a furnace, burn, the bride in prayer is set.  
Supplicates, reflects on his merits, for His pleasure she longs.  
In "The Mansion of Truth" 'tis love disattached that throngs.  
How may the helpless bride admittance to his mansion secure ?  
Says Nanak: in *Jeth* the bride simulates her Lord.  
If through his Grace, His merits sh'd absorb.

21

Auspicious is *Asharh* with the sun in the azure afire,  
Scorching and parching the Earth with darts of fire.  
His chariot courses, frailty takes to shade, and the cricket in  
the wilderness cries.  
Whoso takes along a load of evil suffers a lot in the Yond.  
Whoso on truth contemplates, to him will joys throng.  
Says Nanak: Whoso his mind this wise applies,  
In the Lord he lives, in the Lord he dies.

22

O my mind, in *Savan* rejoice, 'tis the season of clouds and tide.  
I cherish my love with heart and soul, but he abroad doth abide  
He comes not home, for him I sigh; I fear the lightning flash,  
On the lonely bed, in grief I lie,  
O mother mine, in sorrow I die,  
Without Him to eat and sleep and dress is trash.  
Says Nanak : Blessed indeed is the Bride  
Whom the Lord doth hold close to His side.

23

In *Bhadon*, stark illusion is my doom.  
Though brimming with Youth am sunk in gloom.  
Flooded are waters and flooded the plains.

Joyful for all is the season of rains.  
 The night is dark and the clouds they pour.  
 For the lonesome bride is peace no more.  
 At night croak frogs and peacocks shriek.  
 And "Prio! Prio!" cries out poor *chatrik*.  
 The snakes they bite, and mosquitoes they sting,  
 and the pools they overflow.  
 But without the Lord is peace no more.  
 Says Nanak : Take the Master's counsel and hie  
 Whithersoever the Lord doth abide.

## 24

Come back my love in *Asun* month, Your Bride in longing cries.  
 She'd meet with you but through your Grace, in Duality she petrifies.  
 Am wasted by Falsehood, abandoned by You, weeds  
 have grown in my life.  
 The summer in front and the winter behind, 'tis thus that  
 wavers my mind.  
 Everywhere is foliage lush, which ripens to fruition sweet.  
 For the sake of my guru's mediation, O Lord, let me with  
 You in *Asun* meet.

## 25

In *Kartak* ripens the fruit as the Lord doth will.  
 The lamp of Poise burns steadily by Divine illumination lit.  
 Love is, verily, the oil in the lamp.  
 To her Spouse the Bride's way doth it light.  
 Should she die of vice, she is salvaged not,  
 Should she die in merit, is redeemed right.  
 Those blessed with His name and devotion, Poise enjoy.  
 Lord, open Your gates to me and union grant.  
 Sans You e'en a wink indeed is torment long.

## 26

*Maghar* is a month propitious, that fills us with Merits Divine.  
 The merited contemplate His charity, wish I would do likewise.  
 Immutable, prudent and wise is the Creator, ephemeral  
 the world entire.  
 Knowledge Divine and contemplation I obtain if He wills,  
 Him I admire.

I heard the hymns and parable O' His praise,. To me they  
 did all mysteries part.  
 Oh, she is the lord God's choicest Bride who brims with  
 devotion her heart !

27

In *Pokh* it snows;  
 Dry up the woods, dry up the boughs.  
 What keeps You from me far?  
 When You dwell on my tongue, in my body, in my heart.  
 Life O' my life', for the Guru's precept, I do revel in Your Name,  
 Egg-born, womb-born, sweat-born, soil-born, illuminated  
 by you is every Frame.  
 Grant me Your sight: Compassionate, Bounteous;  
 Instruct me, so I liberation find.  
 The bride indeed in delight deports  
 Who loveth with her heart her Lord Divine.

28

In *Magh*, consecrated I become, within me rests the pilgrim-spot.  
 My Lord I met, His merits imbibed, and so I merged in Him my lot.  
 O Beauteous mine! Your merits have seeped into my soul.  
 If it may please You, may I plunge in Your Pool,  
 Where Ganga and Yamuna in confluence holy meet  
 With the seven rivers cool?  
 Worship o' the ever-abiding Lord doth virtue and charity create.  
 In *Magh* the practice of the Presence of God  
 Is to bathe in the pilgrim place Sixty-eight.

29

In *Phalgun* the heart is in bloom, to love attuned.  
 Day and night delight prevails and ego gets consumed.  
 Illusions vanish thro' His holy Grace, the merciful returneth home.  
 But for Him, howso one's bedecked, is out from His palace thrown.  
 He sought me out and decked me with garlands and silken robes.  
 The master united the bride with himself, and she found her spouse  
 and her love.

30

From the union of air and water and fire  
 The body of man doth its shape acquire.  
 The frolicksome intellect in it jubilates.  
 The hidden tenth opens, if you shut nine gates.  
 Know you this, O enlightened one!  
 He alone who scans himself is a seer.  
 The body's but dust, the breath's that speaks.  
 Say, then, O wise one who doth decease?  
 Dies not the seer that resides inside.  
 That which you seek in a pilgrim spot,  
 The jewel sublime is within your heart.  
 Vainly do scholars ruse and debate  
 The treasure within they recognize not.  
 Not me, died my devilish mire.  
 He that *pervades* all didn't expire.  
 Says Nanak: The Guru hath to me revealed my Lord.  
 Now do I see none die or depart.

31

They, whose pleated hair reflected elegance,  
 And vermilion their parting decked,  
 Shorn with scissors are they now,  
 Gathers dust upon their necks,  
 Those who dwelt in gorgeous palaces,  
 To be in attendance aren't now allowed (1)

Hail to you, O Hail, my Lord!  
 O Primal One! who can fathom Your span?  
 You, who ever Your costumes change! (pause-1)

Damsels these when they were married,  
 Splendoured by their side their spouses.  
 Carried in bridal palanquins were they,  
 Ivory bangles did their wrists wear. (2)  
 Water auspicious was wave o'er their heads  
 Fanned they were with mirror-studded fans.

Gifts in lacs were offered them as they sat or rose,  
 Munched they nuts and chewed they dates  
 And bridal couch enjoyed.

Now is noose around their necks  
Their pearl strings broken and scattered to bits. (3)

Wealth and beauty cherished ever,  
Now have their adversaries turned.  
As commanded, minions drive them in disgrace,  
The Lord if He wills He blesses with glory,  
Him if it pleases, He punishment consigns. (4)

Why should we chastisement suffer,  
If with forethought we behave ?  
In fun and frolic the potentates lost their heads,  
Now the writ of Babar prevails;  
Even princes hunger endure. (5)

Some have missed their *puja* hours,  
Others, the timings of *namaz*  
Hindu women miss ritual cooking  
Anointed with saffron they no more are.  
Those who remembered not Rama then,  
Now they can't even utter *Khuda!*  
Some of them, they home return,  
Others about their kins enquire.  
While destined are some to wail on their fate.  
What the Lord willeth, happens that alone.  
What, O what can a human do?

32

Where are the gamblers, where the stables and steeds?  
Where the drums and where the flutes?  
Where are the swordsmen and their chariots  
Where are the crimson martial gowns?  
Where are the mirrors and the elegant faces?  
Nowhere are they visible now ! (1)

Yours is this world, and You its Master  
In a trice You shape, in a trice destroy!  
Brother from brother You divided through pelf. (Pause-I)

Where are the houses, domes and portals,  
Where the palaces and the *serais*?



Where is the bride and her couch of comfort  
On which no sleep did she enjoy?  
Where are the betel-leaves, where the chamber-maids?  
All mere shadows swept away! (2)

Many for opulence have been wasted,  
Multitudes by wealth have been wrecked.  
Riches are obtained not without wrongdoing,  
Can't be carried along by the dead.  
Whomso the Lord doth wish to wreck  
Their goodness he'd first destroy. (3)

Hearing of Babar's approaching invasion  
A million diviners him tried to stall.  
But ancient temples he set ablaze  
Princes he pierced apart  
And threw to winds.  
No miracle, no charm however, did work  
Not e'en one Moghul was struck blind. (4)

Moghuls and Pathans did join in battles  
And sword with sword they measured and fought.  
While Moghuls, they fired their mighty guns,  
The Pathans put forth their elephant horde.  
But those whose destiny was torn in Heaven,  
They had, indeed, to perish for sure. (5)

Disgraced were the Hindu and Moslem women,  
The wives of Bhattis as well as of Thakurs.  
Their veils were torn from top to toe.  
And some on pyres were burnt alive.  
Those whose heroes returned not home:  
How, O how, did they pass their nights? (6)

The Lord Himself is the act and the cause,  
Then to whom may we carry our plaint?  
Joys and griefs from His will flow  
To who else, then, can we wail?  
The Lord His Own Command operates.  
Says Nanak: We get for us what He dictates.

## 33

The clouds are pouring sisters, the rains have come!  
 Your stabbing looks, my Lord, like a woman's ,  
 Entice my passionate heart.  
 Just to have Your sight would I cut myself to pieces,  
 And to Your name sacrifice myself.  
 My pride I rest on You alone,  
 Sans You what pride is mine?

Smash your bangles, O woman, against your bed,  
 Break you your arms and arms of the bed.  
 Of what use are embellishments yours,  
 When your own Spouse is to others attached?  
 Untrue is your bangle-pedlar,  
 Untrue your bangles and bracelet yours.  
 The arms that cannot embrace the Lord  
 Are just worth setting afire.  
 All my sister-friends have gone  
 Their lovely Spouse to please;  
 Whither unfortunate I should go?  
 Well-mannered though I seem to be,  
 My Lord doth favour me not!  
 I've pleated my hair and vermilion applied to their parting,  
 My Lord, however, approves me not.  
 So in anguish great I grieve.

With me the world entire did weep;  
 Wept too the warblers of the woods.  
 But my distance from my love was that did not weep ;  
 And this was what tore me from my Lord.  
 He came in my dream, but hied away,  
 Tearful my eyes became.  
 Now nor can I go myself to Him  
 Nor anyone to Him despatch.  
 Come back to me, my blessed Sleep,  
 That I may see him again.  
 What shall you, Nanak, offer to Him  
 Who brings you tidings o' your Lord?  
 Chop off your head, and make it his seat,

and serve Him without your head.  
 How shall I live, why shouldn't I die,  
 If my Lord be a stranger to me?

## 34

In the mental state in which God can be praised,  
 And the Creator pondered over..  
 In the very same state you laud the Lord  
 And upon the Creator ponder.

Sing you the praises of my Fear-Free Lord.  
 I'd die for the song of perpetual joy.

Day and night He protects His creatures  
 And watches one and all.

His gifts cannot be counted,  
 Nor fathomed be the Giver!  
 Writ is the year and hour of nuptials  
 Come all and anoint my door-step.

O my friend, utter you such blessing  
 That I may with the Lord be united.  
 The gift-package doth at each door arrive  
 And the calls pour every day.  
 Says Nanak: Ponder on Him who sends the call!  
 May the Day of Union for all arrive!

## 35

In sleep my nights are wasted,  
 In eating I waste my day.  
 This life as precious as a diamond  
 For a shell is sold away.  
 You never realized the Name of the Lord (O fool!)  
 In the end, regretful will you fall.

## Selections

### GURU AMARDAS

GURU AMARDAS (1479-1574) came from a village near Amritsar and in 1552 he succeeded Guru Angad Dev as the Sikh Guru. A large number of his compositions are included in Guru Granth. They are very close to devotional folk songs in spirit and style. *Anand* is one of his important longer works. Selections from *Anand* and other compositions are given below.

#### *i*

#### Selections from Anand

##### *1*

O mother mine, beatific delight have I attained  
 For my true Master have I found.  
 Yea, Him have I attained with a tranquil mind,  
 My heart is filled with felicity.  
 Fairy songsters of bejewelled music  
 Have come down the Word to sing.  
 O sing you that divine Word which peoples my heart.  
 Saith Nanak : "I am in divine ecstasy for I 've attained my Lord.

##### *2*

O my mind! abide ever with your Lord-  
 With your Lord abide you ever; and be rid of all your woes.  
 He will always your succourer be and crown your efforts with success.  
 Powerful in every way is your Lord; why be forgetful of Him?  
 Saith Nanak: "Abide ever with the Lord, O my mind!"

##### *3*

Wretched is this body without True Love.  
 Devoid of True Love is miserable this creaturely thing.  
 O Lord! none but You has the might;  
 Bestow on me Your grace.  
 No other shelter anywhere find; save me O Lord with Your Word !  
 Saith Nanak: "Without True Love this poor body attaineth naught."

## 4

O my fickle mind! none through cunning has attained the Lord.  
 None through cunning has ever attained Him, O my mind!  
 This Maya, the great deluder, enticeth all away.  
 But that too is the Lord's creation; by Him is this venom cast. •  
 Sacrifice would I myself unto Him who set this delusion abroad.  
 Saith Nanak : "O my fickle mind! the Lord is not attained through craft."

## 5

O my tongue! Lured by alien tastes, your craving is stilled not.  
 By any other taste your craving won't pass till the taste of the  
     Lord you enjoy.  
 Only if you quaff the Lord's Name will your craviang torment you not.  
 By Grace alone is such a taste attained, only through union with the True  
     Master.  
 Saith Nanak : "All other tastes are forgotten when the mind is lodged in  
     the Lord."

## 6

Listen, O my eyes! to you has the Lord granted sight.  
 Behold you none but the Lord.  
 Besides the Lord, behold you none! By His Grace has He blessed one  
     and all.  
 This "venomous" world that you see is in His very own image.  
 In it may you behold the Lord!

## 7

O my ears! You were sent out to hearken the Truth.  
 To listen to the Truth were you fixed in the body, the holy Word to hear.  
 Hearing which are gladdened both the mind and the body,  
 And the tongue is steeped in joy.  
 The Truth is wondrous and fathomless, indescribable its mien.  
 Saith Nanak: "Hear you the Nectar-Name, for to hearken the  
     Truth were you sent."

O my body! what good have you in this life performed? ~  
 What have been your deeds since you came into this world?  
 Your Creator you cherished not in your heart.

By primal writ and the Guru's grace is the Lord in the mind enshrined.  
Saith Nanak: "Approved becomes this body when it is in  
tune with the Lord."

9

In the cave of the Self, the Lord played the wind-instrument of breath,  
Playing this instrument, He did the nine portals manifest;  
The tenth He left concealed.  
To those approved by the Master was the tenth door shown..  
Through it is the Lord beheld in His myriad forms..  
A fathomless Treasure without limit or end.  
Saith Nanak: "O my dear! in the cave of the Self, the Lord played the  
organ of breath."

10

In the Parlour of Purity, chant you this Song of Joy.  
Sing this song of Bliss inside your heart where the Lord is cherished.  
Absorbed in hallowed reflection are those on whom descends His Grace..  
To them He reveals Himself through the Guru.  
Truth, the overlord of all, is attained by those whom the Lord does bless.  
Saith Nanak: "Chant you this Song of Joy in the Parlour of Purity."

11

O my Fortunate Ones! hear you this Song; fulfil your longings all.  
Attain you the Transcendent Lord, and let your sorrows be stalled.  
Of pain and sickness and sorrow be freed by hearing the Word Divine .  
The saints, our mates, they all rejoiced, when the Master the Word revealed  
Beatified are hearers and utterers alike as the Omnipresence they behold.  
Prayeth Nanak: "By the touch of the Master's feet, erupts the music  
of the soul."

*Anand*, 15th-16th century

*Tr.* by J. S. Neki

*ii*

Selections From Other Works

1

With single-minded devotion whose his True Guru serves,  
Ever would find Him wish-fulfilling:

This he knoweth well who His Grace received.  
 Come you! Pick up the blessings you require,  
 And the fruit you keenly desire.  
 Seek out His Name and on it reflect ;  
 And the Realms of Divine Blissfulness detect.  
 Relish you the joys of the Lord, my mind!  
 Your thirsts, so that, subside.  
 For men of God who tasted of it,  
 Did ever in Bliss abide.  
 The treasure of His Name discovered they  
 Who served their Guru with their heart.  
 Joy Divine in their souls did sprout,  
 And their egos from them did part.  
 The lotus of devotion blossomed forth  
 In their minds adoration—absorbed.

Pure their hearts were tenanted by the Lord  
 And received Divine regard.  
 Scarce are those who serve their Master,  
 Banish their ego, disperse their avarice,  
 Enshrine the Lord in their hearts.

Sacrifice am I to cherish His Name..  
 Blessed are they in the Ages Four..  
 The infinite, Fathomless Name who adore!

## 2

He alone is the true disciple, friend and brother,  
 Who walketh in the Guru's will.  
 Who follows his self is from God alienated,  
 And suffers from grief and grill.  
 Without the True Guru is happiness away  
 Remorse recurrent becomes our fate.  
 Happy are who on the Lord do wait.  
 Away all sins of their past are cast.  
 And them to Himself uniteth the Lord.

Worldly relations are trammels of sorts,  
 The world, in delusion, is strayed afar.  
 Without the Guru are the bonds not snapped,  
 His word's the door o' salvation ajar.

Ignoring His Word, observing rituals,  
 Again and again one's born to die.  
 In egoism an' avarice's the whole world caught,  
 And none is, for sure, another's ally.  
 We find the Lord's Mansion if the Guru is our guide.  
 Then lauding Him we in our True Home abide.

The True Guru's gracious for'ever and for ever,  
 But deprived of luck we nothing secure.  
 With a benevolent eye He vieweth all alike  
 But we our intent endure.  
 Should just our sense of ego depart...  
 The Lord's Name shall be hoisted in our heart.

## 3

On meeting the Guru devotion sprouts,  
 Delusion and desire depart.  
 One's in this world, not of this world,  
 And is in the Lord absorbed.  
 I sacrifice myself to those  
 Who relish their love for the Lord;  
 True Name, the treasure of virtues all,  
 They acquire through the Grace of God.

## 4

The Lord's Name is the ocean of Bliss  
 'Tis through the Guru attained.  
 Day and night on Him you ponder  
 Be in Him ingrained.  
 With Truth Divine inwardly blend,  
 And with your lips His Name commend.

O Brother mine!  
 The world, in duality, is accursed with woe,  
 In the Guru's sanctuary's peace sublime!  
 Day and night you dwell on the Name  
 Impurities will sully you not.  
 Meditate on the Lord and cleanse your mind,



The timeless word, through the Guru realize,  
Suffuse yourself with Nectar-Name!

The Fire of Wisdom the Guru has lit,  
With it your ignorance put to flame.

Foul and filthy the egoists are  
Infected by arrogance, deceit and desire;  
Their filth goes not without the Name,  
Born to die, live in odium entire,  
In a game of illusion they seem to be stuck,  
They've here nor there, nowhere a place!

Men of God, contemplative are,  
Their minds, with penance, they tame.  
The Holy Lord they cherish in their heart  
And dwell on His peerless Name.  
Saith Nanak, on Him you call  
Who's the prop and support of all!

## 5

Finding this world ablaze, sought we refuge with You.  
I supplicate with my True Guru, "Save us and grant sublimity".  
By the Glory of the Holy Name, keep us under Your protection  
None Benevolent as You I find!

Lucky are they who serve Your cause,  
For You alone abide throughout all time.  
Celibacy, charity, austerity're rituals,  
Sans the Guru, we salvation don't find.

To such is revealed the Word Divine,  
Who themselves to shelter Divine have resigned.

## 6

O my mind! wheresoever you may run away, the Lord will ever be there.  
Discard your cleverness, O my mind! and to the Lord's Word adhere.  
Cherish the word for but one moment, and the Lord by your own  
side find.

Sins of your many births find annulled, and attain you the state sublime.  
By the Guru's Grace cherish you your Lord,  
'Twill with your Lord you bind.  
Thus saith Nanak : "whereso you go, thereso the Lord you find!"

7

O my mind! The image of the Light Divine you are.  
Realize you origin yours.  
The Lord is ever with you, my mind,  
Through the Guru's Grace may you Him find.  
Cognize your origin and know your Lord,  
The mystery of birth and death discern.

Through the Guru's Grace, the One realize,  
Duality would not you concern.  
Peace you attain, felicity you find,  
And be accepted by the Lord so kind.  
You're just in the image of Light Divine,  
My mind, realize you origin yours!

8

Within your home is the merchandize,  
Within yourself are the wares.  
Through the Guru's Grace may you dwell on His Name,  
Who unite with Him are rare!  
Inexhaustible indeed is the treasure of the Name,  
You find it by good fortune.

O my mind! shun egoism and vanity discard.  
Through the Guru's Grace, meditate on the Lord.  
Faces of the devotees radiant grow  
By pondering over the Holy Word.  
Here and hereafter Bliss they find  
In their hearts who dote on the Lord.  
Dwelling on the Holy Name they find  
The Palace of the Lord within their heart.

Who denounce their Guru, their faces are blackened,  
Day and night they anguish endure.  
The noose of Death's around their neck.



Even in their sleep they can't have peace !  
Of inner agony they burn in the fire.

He's the One benign benefactor,  
To all doth His charity flow.  
We cannot cavil Him at all  
On whomso He pleases, doth bestow.  
Through the Guru's Grace is He attained,  
Himself alone who Himself doth know.

## 9

Abandoning Nectar, by poison fascinated,  
And serving what's alien to God,  
They desert their *dharma*, realize not the Lord,  
Their days and nights in agony pass.  
The blinded egoists remember not God  
Without any water, drowned they are.

O my mind! run to the Lord's protection ever,  
If the Guru's Word abides in your heart,  
Forget the Lord you'll never!

This frame is but a puppet of Maya,  
In which doth the evil of ego abide.  
The egoist disgrace invites.  
He who serves the true Guru  
All happiness attains.  
His light doth mingle with the Light Divine!  
The service of the Guru is the source of joy,  
Whatever you seek, you find;  
Continence and truth and austerity it brings  
Cleansing the body and mind.

It lodges the Lord inside the heart,  
Then day and night doth Bliss prevail  
It is in union with the Beloved  
That real joy's obtained.  
Those that are under the Guru's shelter  
Myself unto them I'd sacrifice.

At the portal divine true honour they get  
 Effortlessly into Truth they slide.  
 Through His Glance of Grace, Him they attain,  
 Through the Guru's guidance, with Him they unite!

## 10

The self-willed is in attachment bound  
 He 's not for dispassion and candour.  
 The Holy Word He contemplates not  
 In the divine court suffers dishonour.  
 Through the Guru's Grace is egoism shed  
 By merging with the Name does one bliss enjoy.  
 O my mind! day and night desires lure you,  
 Serve the Guru and delusion destroy.  
 Live you may, though, in the world,  
 Be not, however, of the world.  
 The actions of God's men flowers forth,  
 Their renunciation blossoms into bliss,  
 Day and night in devotion absorbed,  
 They ego discard and care-free become.

By good-luck one holy company gets  
 In joy serene one meets the Lord.  
 He alone is a saint, He alone an ascetic,  
 Dwells the Holy Name in whose heart.  
 Evil doesn't affect his mind  
 For he did fully his self discard.

The Guru revealed the treasure of the Name,  
 Joy Divine to the fill we quaffed.  
 Whoso Him found through the Holy Company ,  
 His Destiny awakened, and dispassion he secured.

The egoist wanders, and knows not the Lord,  
 For evil ego has sullied his heart.  
 Saith Nanak : "the devotee's in the Name absorbed,  
 Without the Lord's Fear, one loveth Him not!"

## Eleven Poems

GURU RAM DAS

GURU RAM DAS (1534-1581) was a follower of Guru Amardas, whom he succeeded as Guru. He is a poet of deep passion. His songs are marked by various poetic devices such as alliteration and other sound effects. They express his strong attachment to his mentor Guru Amar Das .

### 1

Distressed are my body and mind  
With the pangs of separation from the Lord.  
How may He come home and meet with me?  
Whensoever I see my Lord,  
Then and there, my pains depart.

Let me my holy mates ask:  
How should I welcome and Him receive?  
O my true Guru,  
None have put you for reprieve!  
We, errant fools, seek refuge Thine,  
Take pity; and us with our Lord unite!

'Tis the Guru who gift of the Name does give  
With the Lord does he ourselves unite.  
And he himself has the Lord realized.  
None as great anywhere I find,  
So to his care myself I resign.  
He alone union with the Lord ensures.

Stubbornness does not union obtain,  
All such effort, sure, is in vain.  
A thousand tricks have the clever ones tried,  
But in the Lord's hue could never be dyed  
The raw fabric of their unsoaking mind!  
Nor is He realized by falsehood and fraud.  
Who sows the seed does reap the crop.

O my Lord!  
You are the storehouse of hope for all;  
None from your door empty-handed returns.  
Those who seek you with devotion  
At your court commendation receive.

In the ocean of venom, we all do sink;  
Save us, O Lord, supplicates Nanak.

2

If any work you want done,  
Only to your Lord return!  
Testimonied it is indeed,  
Surely would your task be done.  
In the company of the holy men  
The treasure of merit doth lie.  
Be there to drink the Nectar Divine.  
O my Compassionate Lord! , the dispellar of fears,  
Pray, my honour fend.  
O Nanak, you sing his praises,  
And the Incomprehensible comprehend!

3

The *Smritis* and *Shastras*, the pundit does chant,  
The name of Gorakh, the Yogi repeats.  
But poor me, I dwell on the Name of my Lord!

You know not what's in store for you,  
Dwell on the Lord, O my mind,  
And swim across the ocean of Being?

The *Sanyasi* with ashes embellishes his limbs,  
Another's woman the Celebate shuns;  
But the plain one, I, on my Lord recline.

The *Kshatriya*, for his valour, we hero designate,  
The *Shudra* and *Vaish* on others wait;  
But poor me, I, by my Lord am saved!

The Creation is Yours, in it you abide;  
Whoso turns to you, in Glory does glide.  
For me, the blind one, You are the Light!

4

The mind is tempted by gold and woman,  
Allurements of *Maya* delightful are!

By mansions, steeds and alien joys,  
 Is humankind attracted indeed.  
 Never do, O Lord, You come to my mind—  
 How shall I Salvation find?

God ! so vile my actions are!  
 Brimming with compassion are You, my Lord!  
 Forgive my faults through your Sovereign Grace!  
 I have no beauty, nor lofty birth, nor manners sweet.  
 Lacking in merit, what plea can I make?  
 Never Your Name did I contemplate.  
 Sinners are saved by the Guru's grace—  
 Therein's the Guru's Glory indeed!

The Lord did give us  
 Life and limb and mouth and nose,  
 And water for our use,  
 Grain for our sustenance, raiment to drape us,  
 Other pleasures besides.  
 The Giver of these one remembers not,  
 The beast considers it his effort's result.  
 Whatso happens is by You ordained.  
 You control all from within.  
 What power we creatures have?  
 Everything, Lord, is but Your play.  
 Purchased in the market is Nanak a slave  
 Of the slaves of Your slaves.

## 5

The blinded we, addicted to the venom of evil,  
 How are we to walk in the Guru's way?  
 The fort of Bliss, the holy Guru, should he lavish his Grace,  
 Unite us to himself he may.  
 Disciples of the Master, O my friends,  
 Follow you the Guru's way.  
 Whatever he says is truly sublime,  
 Wondrous indeed is the legend Divine!  
 Serve the Guru, friends, without delay.

Provide yourself with the nourishment of service,  
 And waver not 'tween that and this day.  
 The Lord's devotees, contemplate on Him,

Walk with your Lord, you holy ones ever.  
 On Him who contemplate, become like Him,  
 And they meet the wondrous Lord.  
 In me has now a yearning arisen  
 For your contemplation O my Lord,  
 Bless me with Mercy Yours !  
 Unite me with the company o' Your saints,  
 And let me be the dust o' their feet.

6

Instructed by the Guru, the township (of myself) I searched.  
 The Treasure of the Divine Name found I therein.  
 O my mind! The Lord decrees you to live in peace.  
 In an instant He slaked the thirst of your desire!  
 The meeting with the Guru annulled your hunger.  
 O mother mine! I live only if I please my Lord.  
 The Beneficent Guru set the Name in my heart.  
 O Lord, of you I am in search.  
 In the company of your saints your essence I find:

By the writ Divine is the Lord attained.  
 The Guru in compassion united me to the Lord!

7

Those in whose hearts the Lord does dwell,  
 Of all maladies are rid.  
 Those who meditate on the Name Divine,  
 Liberated they become, and the Lord they attain.  
 Lord! Rid of all maladies Your devotees are.  
 On the Guru's advice, they contemplate on You  
 And lose the ailment of egoism.  
 Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, afflicted by modes three,  
 Ego-directed are all their deeds.  
 Cherish they not their Creator.  
 The Lord is revealed through the Guru's grace.

The whole world is by the egoism beset,  
 Gripped by the mystery of birth and death.  
 A rare one by the Guru's grace liberation attains.  
 To such a one would I sacrifice myself.



He alone knows who created the universe  
 His own Infinite Form.  
 Says Nanak : "the Lord beholds it in His bliss."  
 This Wisdom to me through the Guru has come!

## 8

Through the Guru's grace, when one does laud the Lord  
 One tastes of His joy with one's tongue and one's heart.  
 Through tongue and heart if one adores the Lord,  
 Without effort does Him one meet.  
 Day and night one relishes Bliss and does repose in peace.  
 To the Word Divine he remains attuned.

With rare luck does one meet the Guru  
 And remain in the Word absorbed,  
 And the 'Life of life' one meets without effort,  
 And merges in the Lord Absolute!

Led to the company of the saints,  
 One bathes in the spring of the Lord.  
 Bathing in the waters immaculate,  
 One's body is sanctified.  
 Vice and dirt and delusion depart,  
 And vanishes ego's pain.  
 By the Grace of the Lord, with the saints one meets,  
 Then in One's own "home " does one rest.  
 Of the Lord's laudation one relishes the taste,  
 And illumination through the Name attains.

Reflects one on the Lord, the Jewel,  
 Loves His Name and is saved by the Word.  
 Dark ignorance is, thus, dispelled.  
 And the light of Wisdom shines within  
 And illumines the Temple home!  
 Surrendering the self one bedecks oneself  
 And be approved by the Lord.  
 Live as the Lord wills and merge into Him.

The Lord has the nuptial bed arranged.  
 I'll wed the Lord through the Guru's grace.  
 To wed me has He come, and Him do, attain.  
 He does love me as His bride.

When I sing His praise with the saints,  
The Lord Himself does me exalt.  
The angels and seraphs and heavenly singers  
Unique my wedding procession make.  
Thus have I attained the Lord Eternal  
Who neither deserts nor departs!

9

As evening spreads the light of the sun,  
So warp and woof the Lord permeates.  
The Lord pervades every street.  
The Guru's word lets me Him meet.  
The selfsame Lord is in every heart.  
Manifests He when to the Guru you flock.  
The Lord fills every space and scar.  
Avaricious materialist finds Him far.  
In every world the Lord pervades.  
That alone happens what He dictates.

10

The Treasure Trove of the Lord's Name  
In a fortress is concealed.  
By meeting with the Guru can it be traced;  
Then mingles light with Light.

Grant me union with Your saints, O Lord,  
At whose sight all sins depart,  
And one attains the State Sublime!

Five big thieves, they rob the fort  
And plunder the wealth of the Lord's Name.  
Traced by the Guru, fast are they caught,  
And all the wealth covered.  
Tireless work in guile and delusion  
Avarice cannot quell.  
Through the guidance of the saints, the Lord we attain,  
The Master of the World leads us to the saints  
In His abundant Grace.  
The heart, then, sings laudation His  
And the mind does find solace.

## 11

With my Beloved I am in love,  
 But how may I meet my Love?  
 With Truth who ever adorned is,  
 I seek but that my Love!  
 Sacrifice would I my soul and my heart  
 Unto my Guru/Friend if him I meet.  
 He shows me the way to my Creator/Mate.  
 Says Nanak : "Am in search o' my Love,  
 Whom the Guru revealed to be by my side."

I stand expectantly by the wayside,  
 Waiting for my Lord, my Friend,  
 Could one lead me to His presence  
 And the veil that parts us rend ?  
 I would cut myself into four  
 And him this offering make..  
 Whoso to my Love's presence  
 Verily does me take.  
 Says Nanak: "The Lord in His Grace  
 Meeting with the Guru possible makes!"

Those in love with their Spouse Beloved  
 Without Him have no solace;  
 And if they were to glimpse his sight,  
 They would rejuvenate.  
 Those who love their Spouse Beloved  
 Without Him won't be alive;  
 Meet Him with ease through the Guru's grace,  
 Your mind would blossom and thrive!

From *Gurbani*, 16th century

Tr. by J.S. Neki

## Heer

## DAMODAR GULATI

DAMODAR GULATI (Dāmodar Gulāti, c. 16th century), a resident of the village of Jhang, wrote the first *Kissa* on the story of Heer. He was a contemporary of Guru Arjun Dev and Raujha. He probably had first-hand experience of the events narrated in the poem, during his term as an officer of land records under the heroine's father. Later writers on the theme have adopted the same text with minor variations.

Dhido is the youngest of seven brothers. As he is unmarried, all the six sisters -in -law are attracted by him . The six brothers therefore conspire to kill Dhido. The latter escapes to Jhang where he falls in love with Heer, the daughter of Chuchak. Heer is married off to Saida, but Heer and Dhido manage to elope. Although they are over-taken by the Kheras, finally they escape. Other narrators have given different versions.

1

When Heer was born, a flawless countenance had she.  
Silk-draped, butter-nourished, she was the midwife's glee.  
Resplendent her face charmed everyone with delight.  
Says Damodar, in Chuchak's tribe, the Beauty, Heer, did alight.  
She grew up proud, her feet won't touch the ground .  
Her spectators would she by her looks confound.  
Milk-nurtured, she did wear a silken veil.  
Sure enough, she was going to create a tale.

3

When she was six, she was benign to all.  
When she was eight, she held the crowds in thrall.  
When she was ten, she conquered the rivers four.  
And at twelve, her Ranjha she began to adore.

4

When she was nine, she had incredible grace.  
She picked up a playmate, if she liked her face.  
Hearing her fame, folks came to visit from afar.  
Three-sixty strong her bevy, each one a star.

5

Let me at first their daily chore describe.  
The bevy, in the morn, would honey and butter imbibe.  
In the forenoon, munch they lentils, ride the swing.  
In the afternoon, play in the woods and juices drink.  
In the eve wash themselves they with cream, and ditties sing.

## 6

Then Noora bared his sword, at Heer he aimed.  
 She twirled, stepped back, his charge thereby she maimed.  
 A second charge he made from 'hind the steed.  
 Said Heer: "Don't flee, 'tis my turn now, take heed."

## 7

Then Heer swung forth her sword at Noora's head.  
 It did not miss its aim, the ground turned red.  
 Half trunk remained in the saddle, half did fly;  
 It looked as a washerman left a pant to dry.

## 8

Maujoo, when Dhido begot, did felicity abound.  
 As status demanded, orchestras did sound.  
 When Dhido was two, his hand for girls was sought.  
 When he was four, he was like a sun on the spot.  
 When he was six folks flocked him to behold.  
 "O what an appearance! None can match his mould!"  
 Spell-bound stood whoever saw him, dazed did look.  
 Says Damodar: "Dhido's glory his sibs could't brook."

## 9

When Dhido rode a steed, birds got afraid.  
 And beasts and bulls and cats were all amazed.  
 Man or woman whoever saw him slept not a wink.  
 The cream of the land came thither to have his glimpse.

## 10

Conspired his brothers how him they could erase.  
 Or kill him sleeping, or poison him while awake,  
 Shred him to pieces, or to strangulate.  
 Says Damodar: "All their grudges they did ventilate."

## 11

Without a "goodbye" to his brothers, Ranjha from home did stray.  
 A stick and a flute he took in his hand, and stealthily slipped away.  
 Crimson his turban, azure his gown, his overdress was turquoise.  
 His nose-pin, ear-rings, and ornaments jingled a noise.

## 12

Without any fare whatever, he left at midnight.  
Having risk of life, he could not change his mind.  
He walked on day and night, nowhere did stop.  
With the stick and the flute, he slept his nights in a mosque.

## 13

If a lass saw him, forthwith was to him sold out.  
"Help me quick with the pot, O mother, or I throw it aground!  
In the mosque has a man descended, and I hope  
You'd wed me to him or with him I'll elope!"

## 14

She ordered her bevy to thrash him who slept on her bed.  
"No lass must miss to hit and have regret."  
Hearing her, he bared his face and brow and head  
He seized them all just like the fish in a net.

## 15

Then Ranjha took out his flute and breathed a tune.  
And echoed the oaks and willows and herbiage around.  
Came lions and wolves and tigers his praise to sing.  
It looked as if on the Id Day people were praying.

## 16

Heer caught hold of Ranjha and swam him ashore.  
With playmates three-hundred sixty, she conned a sport.  
And sat on the river-bank Dhido with his lass.  
And none with none conversed—this came to pass...

## 17

A stealthy glance she cast, but uttered no word.  
And ample showed regret, without a word.  
Thought she, perhaps her demeanor Ranjha took amiss;  
In truth, but the *pīrs* their affiliation did bless.

## 18

Then Heer bade all her comrades to hie away.  
 "Go hence and take to swings; around not stay!"  
 Thus earned aloofness sending them all away.  
 Then subtly over her bed did Ranjha she lay.

## 19

"O none any more should call me Heer or even Syal .  
 None should my caste describe, am wedded to my vassal!  
 O when was I Chuchak's daughter? When was it a fact?  
 I hold the hem of Ranjha, if me'd he accept!"

## 20

"O my mother! I've found a vassal who would your buffaloes graze.  
 By his grace would grass not dry, nor calf nor buffalo laze.  
 Never at all would drought occur and the clouds would pour always.  
 Indeed have I found a vassal like this, and the rest but your fate."

## 21

Under the banyan and peepal tree, the assembly held its task.  
 "Softly walk and softly speak , but first for water ask.  
 Partly cover your face with *lungi*, utter rhapsodies not."  
 This said Heer and counselled Ranjha to follow her to that spot.

## 22

Flocked tigers, wolves and cheetahs to Ranjha unheeded.  
 Ranjha left the swamp and to fields proceeded.  
 He patted the miens of lions, with them did play,  
 "Listen, O mates!" to them did he say,  
 "My destiny brought me here for a fateful day!"

## 23

And when he milked the buffaloes, a miracle did he kick:  
 None he had to bribe or grease, they all stood still.  
 The one with a calf forgot her calf, got milked without a tether.  
 The dried ones also yielded, one more than the other.

24

"Listen Heer ! I tell you this: your affair's been broadcast.  
Your father, Chuchak, when he hears, will disown you fast.  
You hold a liaison with a vassal, with untied hair you walk.  
You sold yourself to your vassal, of this folks everywhere talk."

25

"So long as a girl was a virgin, she would but play with dolls.  
When a man she found to sire her, her dolls she forgot.  
Now have I found my wonderful man, naught in his place can serve.  
Bounting and swings I leave for you, myself to Ranjha reserve."

26

Mehri took that to her heart; in confidence sent for Heer.  
"Daughter mine, in age advanced from my womb did you I bear.  
I can't kill you, but I myself should live or die, can't say!  
But O my daughter," Mehri said, "you've put me to shame today!"

27

"What has incited you, O mother? May your sons live long!  
Wherefore such invectives for me? But I have done no wrong.  
I a simple virgin am, an affair I scarce understand."  
Says Damodar, thus did Heer meet Mehri's reprimand.

28

"Listen, my well-bred daughter (I sacrifice a buffalo for you!)  
Whose daughter are you? Who your in-laws should be?  
You are a proper match for those who Akbar's rivals are.  
Know then whatever you are doing is morally uncalled for!

29

"Listen! O listen! 'my treasure of merit!' Whither, O whither you veer?  
You're buzzed in every home today; should your brother hear!  
The vassal yours, misfortune ours; I very much wish he'd die.  
I know not how he hither came or whence or even why!"



## 30

"Hearken, O my opinionated mother ! Who can your outburst tame?  
Take heed! With rice in your own mouth, do not another's son blame.  
Be wise and shed your frivolous doubts, and do not be so wild;  
And have the same compassion for him as you have for your own child.

## 31

"Listen, O mother ! Those Kheras of yours whom you so much esteem,  
They do not know what true love is, to not they petty seem  
Cursed be they, whom once and again, you bootlessly applaud.  
I sacrificed myself to him whom I accept as Lord."

## 32

"O daughter, may I die for you, of counselling you I tire!  
This man mis-shapen hither came, and no one would him hire.  
It was you who sang his praises; why upon us turn?  
May God will, we should all be one and this vassal spurn!"

## 33

"Grieved am I with pain for Ranjha, tear-drenched is my dress.  
Unrelenting is the longing that for Ranjha I possess.  
What do they know of worldly love, who don't divine love bear?"  
Says Damodar: Questioned Heer, "Who can my wedding declare?"

## 34

"O you, youth-intoxicated wench! Your wedding your father's fixed.  
Forbiddance for you doth little mean, for us you shame incurred.  
Having liaison with a vassal, you crazily roam at night."  
Says Damodar: Heer of Syals would just not keep quiet.

## 35

"Just as a flower to sunlight turns, I live at my Ranjha's beck.  
I myself would garland thread and wrap it round his neck.  
In my own boat did him I find, 'tis there he won my heart."  
Says Damodar: Entreated Heer, "My love may never depart!"

36

"O when was I a vassal O Heer? I was a noble's son!  
But as I came, gave you my heart, agreed to be your minion.  
Your buffaloes I grazed, and lashes I bore, and earned for my  
tribe but shame;  
Tell me what you propose for now, confide in me, my dame!"

37

"Listen, my Lord! My sire you are, but put me not to testing;  
Fall I at your feet, my love! O leave me not protesting.  
Pray, give me all your cordial love; for God, delude me not."  
Says Damodar: "O Ranjha dear! at you feet is my lot."

38

A large wedding party the Kheras brought, they came with solemn speed.  
With Turkish, Taazi and Arabic camel and pony and steed.  
Their saddles velvet-lined were they, and servants had they rife.  
Says Damodar: "The marriage party of Heer was a bee-hive!"

39

Then Heer did wail atop her voice, so everyone heard her cry:  
"The groom's train's come, and all are joyed, but watch how languish I?  
Horses, they neigh, and men, they trot; I only am on death-point!"  
Says Damodar: "May their children perish who me for wedding anoint!"

40

Said the Qazi, "Listen O Heer, an agent appoint you may;  
Whom I may ask of your consent while in your veil you stay.  
Do you accept the son of Ali? Say loud so all can hear."  
Says Damodar then forthwith did Heer her negative answer blare.

41

"Nor am I dumb or deaf, O Qazi that I would an agent engage.  
See, here I slip out of my veil and you my answer take.  
Here I proclaim, I say it aloud, my answer is no other,  
I shall but my Ranjha accept, and Kheras will my mother!

42

Gagged they her, let her not speak; they her assent propound.  
 By hand, then, as her brothers led her so she went around .  
 "How can you wed me forcibly, father, when I wail and weep?"  
 But forthwith was she pushed inside where she was supposed to sleep!

*Heer*, c. 16th century

Tr. by J.K. Neki

## Selections

### GURU ARJAN DEV

GURU ARJAN DEV (1563-1606) was the fifth Sikh Guru. He had a major part to play in the making of the Holy Granth. His contributions are usually classified under three groups: *Sukhamani* (Peace of Mind), *Bavan Akhari* (Fifty-two Letters) and *Bara Maha* (Twelve Months).

A few passages from *Sukhamani*, *Bara Maha* and other compositions are given below:

#### I

#### Peace of Mind

##### 1

Obeisance mine to the Primal Lord.  
 Who was before times began,  
 Truly, who is the One True Lord,  
 And is the God Supreme :

##### 2

The woe and grief of the humble you shelve,  
 Lord of the helpless, in all you reside  
 'Tis but your shelter that I seek  
 Be you ever by my side!

##### 3

All the Shastras and Smritis  
 "I've searched and sought  
 The invaluable name of the Lord  
 They can equal not !

O you meritless, ignorant one,  
 Ever remember the Lord.  
 Think of Him who raised you,  
 And with you ever shall last.

5

You who your Benefactor forsake  
 And ever pursuits again make,  
 Fulfilment will you never obtain  
 And lose your honour without His Name.

6

Lust and wrath, attachment and avarice,  
 And egoism mine may depart:  
 So bless me but with Your Own Grace  
 I seek your cover, O Lord.

7

Beyond all ken and beyond all reach  
 Is my transcendent Lord.  
 Saved you are if you utter His Name.  
 Listen, O friend: Nanak supplicates,  
 Such is the wonderful story of the Saints.

8

The true one in his mind, the true one on his tongue  
 Besides him who nothing else does behold  
 Such is the one who knows the Lord.

9

He who His Name in his heart upholds  
 And in all creation the Lord beholds,  
 Every moment who worships the Lord  
 Such is an *aparsa* who saves all.

*10*

Innumerable men praise You, O Lord!  
Yet, fathomless is Your praise.  
In countless ways, indeed, did you  
The Universe entire raise.

*11*

The one Lord is the cause of all,  
A second none I see.  
Am a sacrifice unto Him who's spread  
Over land, mid-skies and sea.

*12*

The humble do in peace abide  
For down their ego they have brought.  
The mighty ones who're vain and proud  
Do in their arrogance rot.

*13*

Who so seeks the shelter o' the Saints  
Liberation does he gain.  
And who so verily slanders the Saints  
Transmigrates ever again.

*14*

Give up your cleverness, O good men,  
And meditate on His Name.  
And rest your hope only in God .  
Cast out doubt, fear and pain.

*15*

The repository of every power is the Lord  
And knows every inside,  
By meditating on whom is liberation gained,  
To him I'm a sacrifice.

16

Nor has He form nor feature nor hue  
The three traits He transcends.  
He alone knows Him Nanak,  
On whom his grace descends.

17

Who was in the very beginning  
Was even when times began;  
He now is and shall ever and ever remain.

18

The true Guru's one who the true Lord realized  
In his company shall the disciple find liberation,  
And chant the holy Lord's laudation.

19

Except for devotion, nothing shall be with you  
Maya, the venom, is like cinders plain.  
By practising the Name of the Lord alone  
The real wealth's obtained.

20

After wanderings wide and large  
To your shelter I resort.  
And this is what Nanak prays  
In your love hire me, my Lord.

21

Himself He's attributed,  
Himself sans attributes.  
Himself the trance of peace.  
Himself He raised His creation.  
Himself in it manifest.

22

The master of every life, O Lord,  
 In all You Yourself stir.  
 You are the one alone in all,  
 Where is to be seen another.

23

The collyrium of wisdom the Guru gave me,  
 So departed the darkness of nescience,  
 By the Grace of God I met the saint  
 And my mind illumined became.

24

I dwelt on the perfect one,  
 Perfect is whose Name.  
 Thus did I attain Him;  
 So my Lord I praise!

From *Sukhmani*, 16th-17th century

Tr. by J.S. Neki

II

## Twelve Months

I

To us, from you separated,  
 As a consequence of our own deeds, O Lord,  
 In Your Grace grant reunion!  
 Pointlessly we wandered in diverse directions,  
 Worn out, to Your Protection, have we repaired.  
 Like a dry cow is my state, of use to none;  
 A sapling without water, that never shall blossom.  
 How may a forlorn woman, separated from her spouse, find peace?  
 Cursed is her town, cursed her village,  
 If her home the Lord has visited not.  
 Of what worth are her embellishments,  
 Her betel-flavoured mouth, and even her whole body?  
 To one from her Lord separated, even friends are a spectacle of doom.  
 Supplicates Nanak: "Be merciful and grant me devotion to Your Name.  
 O Lord of Abode Imperishable! Unite me with Yourself."

2

Let us with the dawn of *Chet* meditate on the Lord and joy receive.  
 Reciting His Name with our tongues in the company of His devotees.  
 To have attained Him is to glorify our life on this earth.  
 Without Him to live an instant is to waste the whole life.  
 Pervades He through land and water, and woods and mid-air.  
 What an agony to heed Him not!  
 Blessed are those who treasure His Love in their hearts!  
 O how my soul thirsts for a glimpse of His visage!  
 In the month of *Chet*, whoever unites me with Him,  
 At his feet would I fall!

3

*Asarh* scorches those who from their spouse are asunder.  
 Forsake they Him who is Life of the Universe,  
 and on powerless mortals lean.  
 In Duality they constantly wander and slip into Yama's noose.  
 As is writ on the brows, one reaps what one sows.  
 The Night of our Life terminates in regrets; in despair one departs!  
 But whoso meet the Lord's saints move freely in His Court.  
 "Grant me this favour, O Merciful Lord,  
 that desire for your sight be my thirst.  
 Thus does Nanak supplicate: "Other than You  
 there's none to whom I may turn."  
 Pleasant is *Asarh* to those who make room in their heart  
 for the Lord.

4

Attached to the Lotus Feet of the Lord, blossoms the woman  
 in *Sawan* !  
 Her body and mind dyed in Truth, she dwells in the Name Divine.  
 The pleasures of Venomous Maya must into ashes turn.  
 Through the Grace of the Guru does the Lord  
 bedew our hearts with nectar.  
 Unfathomable is His Power, Immeasurable His Sweep;  
 'Tis He Who makes woods and pastures bloom.  
 I crave for His Sight, who's reachable through His Grace.  
 who their Beloved have found!



## 5

*Kartak* decrees: 'tis fruit of your actions that You reap,  
 None else blameworthy is.  
 All ills proceed from forgetting the Lord.  
 Birth after birth alienation persists.  
 Turns sour in an instant all creaturely comfort.  
 To whom to complain? Who can intercede?  
 That which is decreed must come to be.  
 What can a powerless creature do?  
 Union with the Lord alone annuls alienation,  
 Prays Nanak: "Save me, O Lord-Emancipator!  
 In holy company, relieve me of all sorrows!

## 6

In *Pokh* cold and frost oppress them not  
 Who're wrapped in the Lord-Spouse's arms.  
 Their minds fixed on His lotus feet,  
 In His sight are they looked.  
 Their profit is the Lord's service,  
 Their protection, the Lord Himself.  
 Immune are they from venomous sensuality,  
 In holy company they praise the Lord.  
 Merged with their Source, in True Love they abide.  
 When the Lord will grip their hand, never again  
     shall alienation occur.  
 Unapproachable, unknowable is my Friend indeed—  
 May I be a sacrifice unto Him a million times!  
 Compassionate is He to those who at His doors kneel.  
*Pokh* is full of beauty and joy to those  
 On whom the Lord's amnesty descends.

## 7

Union with Him is granted through His Grace  
 To saints who with Him associate!  
 All joys, then, flock to their nuptial bed  
 And sorrows depart.  
 The fortunate woman finds wishes fulfilled  
 For she has the Divine King as her spouse.  
 The bridesmaids all sing ditties of praise  
 Lifting their voice to the Lord.

No coequal to the Lord they find, none to match His might!  
 Here and hereafter His blessings they get  
 And find a station in Eternity.  
 He verily saves them in the ocean of Existence,  
 And frees them from the Cycle of Births.  
 I have but one tongue, Infinite are His praises,  
 Liberation can be found by falling at His feet.  
 Continue, in *Phalgun*, to praise the Lord,  
 Who has not even a wee bit need!

8

Every month and day and moment  
 Auspicious becomes for those  
 Who the Grace of the Lord obtain.  
 "Grant me Your Grace", supplicates Nanak,  
 "I crave for a glance of your Visage."

From *Bara Maha*, 16th-17th century

Tr. by J.S. Neki

III

Other Compositions

1

How shall I happiness achieve, O Brother,  
 How find the Lord our Helper True?

Happiness eludes if to wealth you cling.  
 Palaces 're only a shadowy thing.  
 The life gets wasted in vain in greed.  
 Please you though your elephant and steed,  
 And hordes and robes and ranks and slaves,  
 Around one's neck are they Ego's noose!

Should one's writ in the ten directions run,  
 With damsels pretty one may even have fun.  
 Yet, such a one's a king turned beggar in a dream!

The true Guru's shown me the way to my weal:  
 That His will's welcome, His devotees feel.  
 Conquer your Ego and Him you reveal!  
 Thus is happiness achieved, O Brother,  
 And the Lord attained, our one True Helper!

## 2

Like a herdsman, here, you've come for a while  
What show can you here display?  
When the time is o'er, you'll have to move,  
Homeward you'll take your way.  
Therefore sing you the Lord's praise,  
In the service of the Guru, with devotion engage.

A guest for the night, in the morn you depart,  
Why such a passion for pelf and vault?  
Why not seek Him who gives you all?

The millions you have you'll have to forsake.  
To get human form, you'll much transmigrate,  
The day of departure is not away,  
To remember the Lord, so you must make haste!

## 3

Wondrous, wondrous is Your Name, Lord!  
And the worldly pride, but false! false! false!  
Beauteous is Your presence, fair devotees Yours.  
Bereft Your Name, this world is but grime.  
Marvellous is Your Power, Praise-worthy Your Pace.  
Priceless is Your Nature, my True King of Grace.

For the unsupported ones, the One support are You.  
The pride of the poor, I contemplate You.  
Merciful to me are You ever, O my Lord;  
Forsake me not, O my soul, my breath, my heart!

## 4

Nectar-sweet are Your words, my Love!  
Beauteous are You, O Enticer o' my heart.  
Detached You roam in the midst of all.

Desire I not kingdom, nor redemption I crave;  
Your Lotus-feet are all I love!  
Brahma, Shiva and Indra You are.  
Contained in You appear they all.

I, Your slave knock at Your Door.  
The refuge of Your saints is what I implore.  
Thus have I met You, O wonderful Lord,  
My mind is sated and it blossoms forth!

5

A man who doesn't realize himself, came to this world in vain.  
Decking himself in various ways  
Is like a corpse well-draped.  
The mammonist rushed around excited,  
Pelf and lucre to hoard.  
To him his whole accumulated wealth  
Becomes of little avail.

Decked with ornaments, the glamorous woman  
Lies on her laureate bed;  
If she had not her Spouse's company,  
Grief would strike her dead.  
All day long, a man does labour  
Threshing the husk away;  
Endures this forced labour he,  
With no profit or gain.

Whoever His Benediction received,  
Reflecting on the Name o' the Lord,  
He does holy company keep.  
And relish the taste of God.

6

In love am I with my sweet Beloved!  
That it should neither break nor snap,  
So pull the string o' your Love, my Lord!  
Day and night You abide in me;  
Shower Your Grace, O Lord, on me.

Sacrifice am I unto You, my Lord,  
Ineffable whose account I heard.  
Lord! I am the slave of the slave o' Your slave  
Shower on me, my Love, Your Grace!

## 7

Him I saw in the forest, Him I saw in the straw;  
 Him I saw in the dwellings, Him I saw in the wild!  
 Staff-bearing, matted-haired, fasting was He seen,  
 Pilgrim-austere, at times, did he seem.  
 The saints helped me see Him abiding in myself.  
 From Heavens to the netherworlds pervading everywhere.  
 So sang I His praises with relish and delight!

I saw Him in the Yogi as in the Sanyasin,  
 In celibate and the hermit,  
 In austere men of silence,  
 In eighteen Puranas and Smritis,  
 All claiming: 'There's but One!'  
 From whom, should we think, He distance keeps?  
 Infinite, Unapproachable, Remote He seems.  
 None, O none, can His worth appraise!

Nanak, verily, is a sacrifice unto Him  
 In whose heart He Himself does reveal.  
 Lord Compassionate!

## 8

Lord, Compassionate to the humble,  
 Have Mercy on me!

Merits and demerits may reckon not You,  
 How can clay be washed filth-free?  
 Such is my destiny, indeed, my Lord !

O my mind!  
 Serve your Guru , that comfort you find!  
 Gather you then, for what you crave.  
 And rid yourself of every grief.

Unbaked earthenware You bedecked,  
 And filled it with Your luminous glow,  
 As is Your writ, so the deeds we do.

When were our mind and body ours?  
 Cycles of birth and death we endure.

He who blessed us, we cherished Him not,  
In blind attachment did we rot.

He who raised us knows alone  
His unapproachable Palace-Home.  
Him I praise, His Mercy crave—  
For I am but His bonded slave!

9

Since I attained the company of the saints,  
All jealousies I forget.  
None is my enemy, none a stranger,  
I am a friend to all!  
Whatso He does, is for our benefit—  
This wisdom from the saints I got.  
All-pervasive is the One True Lord,  
And I blossom as Him I watch!

10

The world of three modes, the 'Enticer' has lured.  
False is the world into greed ensnared.

Announcing as "mine", one gathered one's riches,  
In the end, everyone Maya ditches.

Fearless and formless and merciful God,  
He sustains whatever He's wrought.

Some, what they earn, they bury underground.  
Some, won't let it slip even in a dream.  
Ruling o'er the world, their treasures would grow,  
But ramshackle Maya won't with them go.

Some love it dearer than their vitals and their frame.  
Renouncing their parents, some it obtain.  
Kept concealed from son, sib, friend,  
It doesn't stand by one in the end.

Some become ascetics and stay in trance.  
Some with Pundits and sophists romance.  
Living in homes, crematoria or woods,  
Wherever they go, it clings to their skirts.

Whoso has his bonds curtailed by the Lord,  
With him resides the Name o' the Lord.  
Redeemed by the company of saints does he shine.  
Emancipated he is through Grace Divine!

*11*

Defiled we are, You cleanse our foulness,  
Meritless are we, You merit bestow.  
Foolish we are, All-knowing are You,  
Deftness in every prowess You show.

O our Lord!  
Such are we and such are You,  
Sinners we are and You Redeemer,  
Elegant is Your abode!

You are the Creator, You Benefactor,  
Breath of life in Beings You blow.  
Merit we not, but crave for Your Grace,  
Which, in Your Mercy, pray bestow.

You do us good, we reckon it not,  
Though Compassionate ever are You.  
You're the Giver of happiness true!  
Designer of Destinies, the Purusha Great,  
Save me You, who am Your seed.  
You are our Treasure, our King Eternal,  
Creatures at Your Doorstep, You entreat.

They our surety stand o'er Time,  
Save us You after Your Saints sublime!

*12*

The first advice was to send an epistle,  
The second to despatch two men.  
The third was to use some special means,  
But leaving all these I remembered my Lord!  
Then I got bliss and I poise obtained;  
Finished were my foes and my faith sustained.

My true Guru has instructed me thus:  
My body and soul are the Maker's abode.

All that I do, occurs by Your Might.  
You are my shelter and my Juridic Court.  
If I forsake You, whither can I go?  
None there is can equal Your Splendour.

Lord, Your slave stands daunted by none.  
The worshipper of Power does wander in the wild.

Your Glory, Lord, Ineffable I find;  
Hold us in Your Love here and hereafter.  
Seeks Your Refuge, Nanak Your slave,  
Felicitations blare as my honour You save!

13

O Lord! me from Sulhi did You protect.  
Wicked designs he could't fulfil,  
Instead, met a defiling death.  
Lord, with your Axe, you chopped off his head,  
In an instant reduced him to dust.  
Contemplating evil, he was claimed by fire,  
His Creator to Death him accurst.  
Devoid of progeny, friends and riches,  
All his kinsfolk here he left!

14

Most sweet-spoken is my Lord Beloved.  
With great care have I observed,  
Never has He ever one harsh word uttered.  
Knows not a harsh word He, my Lord,  
Perfection incarnate's He.  
Reckons not my faults He ever!  
To purify the fallen is the covenant of His Grace,  
Leaves not uncrowned He the slightest effort.

Abiding in every heart, penetrating all,  
Nearer than the nearest is He.  
Nanak, His slave, ever seeks His Shelter ,  
My friend who's nectar-sweet!



## 15

From the great Fire,  
 You saved me, Lord,  
 Whenso Your Refuge I sought!  
 On You I pride;  
 On You rely;  
 No other hope than Yours I prize.

My King Divine!  
 Saved am I as I dote on You,  
 You're my prop, on You I incline.

Contemplating Your Name, I safety enjoy.  
 From the Blind Well You did rescue me, ahoy!  
 Even Your Grace You showered on me.  
 All my sustenance came from You  
 You snapped my bonds by Your Mercy.

Your devotion is but Your dole;  
 In Your service, pray, me yoke.

Gone is my passion,  
 Finished, my fear,  
 And my mind, of all doubts clear.

Lord, You did my sorrows efface.  
 Met with the Guru, I, through Your Grace!

*From Gurbani, 16th-17th century*

*Tr. by J.S. Neki*

## Selections

### BHAI GURDAS

BHAI GURDAS (1558-1637) was born in a village near Amritsar. He spent his whole life in the service of Sikh Gurus. He was a great scholar and wrote in both Punjabi and Braj Bhasha. His place as a writer is next only to that of the Sikh Gurus. He had helped Guru Arjan Singh to compute the Granth Saheb.

## 1

The Great Guru Nanak do I salute  
 Who counselled us ever our Lord to love.

Save us from drowning in the Ocean o' Being  
 And with Eternity forged our link.  
 Healed our alienating disbelief,  
 Dispelling the Delusion that cramps the world,  
 And saved us from transmigration's throes!

An infidel hath but a wretched life,  
 And o'er his head hangs Yama's sword.  
 But whoso to Nanak's feet adhere,  
 And chant Satnam are saved from woe.

This wise Divine Love the Sikhs acquire—  
 The Guru's Day they observe with love.

We reap in the end whatso we sow!

2

The Lord He heard mankind lament  
 So into the world was Nanak sent.  
 He washed his feet, and Nectar sublime  
 His Sikhs he gave that to imbibe.  
 To men in the Dark Age, he revealed  
 The one Transcendent Lord Supreme.  
 Restored he Dharma firm on its feet;  
 The four castes made he one indeed.  
 He equal made the prince and the page,  
 Touching o' the feet he greetings made.  
 Inverting the usual into discrete,  
 He made the head bend on to the feet.  
 Redemption he granted to this Dark Age.  
 Thus Nanak came this world to save!

3

At first was the Guru at the Lord's Court blessed,  
 And then did his labour of love commence.  
 His diet was sand and acrid shrub  
 The cragged ground made up his bed.  
 Penance austere he did observe.  
 Being thereby blessed befriended the Lord.  
 On him was the Honour celestial bestowed  
 Nine Treasures he got and the Name o' the Lord.

Through deep perception, then, came to see  
 The world ablaze in dire misery.  
 Without the Guru no light does glow.  
 The populace vile did whine in woe.  
 A pilgrim's attire did Baba then don.  
 The practice of resignation he began.  
 Then forged he forth the world to reform.

## 4

The Siddhas said, "Pray, Nanak, say.  
 How is the mortal world today?"  
 That Nanak was incarnation Divine  
 Come to this world, its people to deliver,  
 The Siddhas already had come to discover.

The Guru replied, "Listen you, O Naths!  
 Truth is like moonshine, lightless untruth.  
 And now's untruth manifest in the world  
 A moonless night that's everywhere spread.  
 I undertook this obyssey the Truth to find!

Evil has simply devoured the globe  
 The Bull of Dharma from underneath bemoans.  
 When into hills have the Siddhas withdrawn,  
 Who would from untruth salvage man?  
 And Yogis too are of enlightenment bereft,  
 Just with ashes besmear themselves.

Devoid of the Guru, the world has sunk!

## 5

"O Gosain!", the Guru then said,  
 "The canine-mouthed Dark Age has come  
 And victuals have cadavers become!  
 Inequities grave perpetrate the kings—  
 Crops are being devoured by the fence.

The commoners, blind, of knowledge bereft,  
 Pour out falsities from their tongue.  
 Personal orchestras disciples sound  
 The gurus to its music dance around.

The followers all in their home stay put.  
While gurus walk down to pay them a visit.

Even the judges corruption transact:  
Injustice they administer, and bribes they accept.  
Women love their men for money alone,  
Good or evil, from whereso it comes!

Such sinfulness does the world engulf."

6

The Qazis and Mullahs, they gathered together,  
And questioned Nanak of issues of faith.  
"The Lord Himself His Creation has spread  
And no one can His Nature assess."

Queried they, "Open your Book and say,  
Of Hindus and Muslims who does outweigh?"

"Listen O Hajis," the Guru replied,  
"Without good deeds will both contrite.  
False is the tint of the flower *kusumbh*,  
Wash it with water and the colour won't stay,  
Ram and Rahim stand face to face,  
And on each other invectives spray.

The world thus goes the Satanic way!"

7

In the flower He abides as fragrance,  
As black-bee covets it too.  
In the mango He abides as juice,  
As a cuckoo seeks it too.  
In the cloud He resides as raindrop,  
As peacock and *papiha* He smarts.  
If milk is with water mixed,  
As swan He splits them apart.

Formless Himself, a form assumes  
A carnal frame and a breath He drafts.

Himself He does everywhere operate,  
But is to be found through the Guru's Grace!

## 8

Small is the little finger of the hand,  
Yet, honoured it is with a ring of gold.  
Tiny is the droplet falling from the cloud,  
In the cystem shell into pearl it turns.  
Short indeed is the saffron plant,  
Yet, it graces the forehead as a mark.  
Diminutive is the alchemist's stone,  
Turns it baser metals into gold.  
Small is the snake that wears in its head  
The jewel that folks do furtively seek.  
Minim is the elixir that quicksilver yields,  
But priceless is even a grain of it.  
When the self is surrendered, greatness is attained!

## 9

In her parents' home can a daughter indulge,  
Dear to mama and papa both;  
As sister from her brother regard she obtains,  
And care from maternal and paternal kin.

Millions are lavished on her wedding day  
On ornaments, fabrics, and dotal gifts,  
Thus when goes to her husband 's place,  
Lucky she's deemed for her nuptial home.  
Connubial bliss she enjoys with her spouse,  
Prepares for him diverse cuisine.  
In folk as in elite belief is she  
Considered the better half, salvage's door.

Thus has the Guru himself decreed :  
The font of comfort is woman indeed.

## 10

Draped in smiles, when Dhruv came home,  
The king took him into fatherly lap.

His step-mother demurred and grabbed'm by the arm,  
And pulled him apart from the father's clasp.  
Embarrassed, he went to his mother and asked,  
"Mother mine! are you a queen or just a slave?"  
Replied she, "A princess by birth though I was,  
Seldom did I myself to God devote!"

"How can my foes turn into my friends.  
How can I right to my throne reaffirm?"

"Contemplate on God, for, thatwise alone  
You can rise from a fallen state."

Dhruv got detached from the world thereupon  
And forestward forthwith marched.  
From Narad he received instruction there,  
And drank the Nectar of the Holy Name.  
Later, recalled by the king he came,  
The sceptre and crown were offered to him,  
But he declined them with disdain.  
"Tis but for godmen to accept retreat,  
Where worldly men would victory announce!

11

Some canine flesh, a sweeper wench,  
She coddled and cooked in wine.  
And poured it into a human skull,  
That reeked with emanation defiled.  
With a blood-stained rag she covered it well,  
Then out she carried the stinking stuff  
After carnal indulgence that she did have.  
She was queried while she was on her way,  
"Why cover you this heinous stuff?"  
"Lest it be desecrated by the glance  
Of some ungrateful eye perchance!"

12

A criminal like me, sinful, egoistic and wicked,  
A thief, a debauch, a gambler, alluring other women,  
A slanderer, evil-minded, dishonestly living,  
A thug and a robber, way-layer of the land,  
Raving with lust and anger and delirium,

Greed and attachment, vanity and pride.  
 Deceitful, ingrate, whom none would shelter!  
 Remember your Satguru, O proselyte bard,  
 He alone would forgiveness grant.

*Vārs*, 16th-17th century

*Tr.* by J.S. Neki

## Thirty-Two Poems

### SULTAN BAHU

SULTAN BAHU (1538-1599) according to some scholars; (1631-1691) according to others. He was born in the village of Aswan, now in Pakistan, as the son of Sultan Bayazed and Rasti. He was a disciple of Hazrat Habibullah. As a Sufi poet of the Kadri school, he disliked the display of piety. His Arabic and Persian works have not survived. He used the form *Davayya* for his Punjabi poems.

#### 1

By the Grace of Allah (God), my teacher has planted Chamba  
 in my mind Hoo<sup>1</sup>  
 It is watered by void and existence in all conditions Hoo  
 The plant has spread fragrance inside, while it nears blossom Hoo  
 May the teacher live longer, who has sown the plant Hoo.

#### 2

After reading Allah one memorizes the Koran, removing  
 the veils of ignorance Hoo  
 Learning makes one a scholar par excellence, but still not  
 free from seeking gold Hoo  
 Even mastering thousands of books does not annihilate  
 strong desire Hoo  
 None can kill, says Bahu, this thief of the soul Hoo.

#### 3

Allah favoured me when my love sparked off to reach beyond Hoo  
 Day and night he intensifies the naive emotion, every moment He  
 strengthens and pushes it Hoo

1. Sultan Bahu ends every line<sup>4</sup> with the word "Hoo", which means in Arabic, *That* : a pronoun used to Allah (God).

My soul has turned into flames, word and smoke Hoo  
 O Bahu, I have found God nearer than the aorta after enflaming  
 in love Hoo.

4

Beginning and eternity are all in His order, He has witnessed all his  
 plays pass Hoo  
 Seven under-worlds and seven skies are all inside, within the  
 body enflamed by love Hoo  
 Those who have not recognized Him are robbed of both the worlds Hoo  
 A lover is lost into the union with his beloved, watch  
 the state of their bodies who are bereft of it Hoo.

5

He permeates the inner and the outer but why is Bahu  
 looking for Him elsewhere Hoo  
 He affects as love and the affection burns with every breath Hoo  
 Where he emits light, darkness vanishes Hoo  
 Bahu is his slave for both the worlds, who recognizes  
 Him rightly Hoo.

6

This world deserves partial condemnation, the entire  
 world is a slave Hoo  
 Those who do not spend their money of discipline of Him, O Bahu,  
 they invite fierce punishments Hoo  
 Where fathers kill sons, to hell with this world of cheats Hoo  
 Those who renounce the world, only they will celebrate in the  
 future Hoo.

7

All pray for the everlastingness of their faith, but very few  
 for the eternity of their love Hoo  
 They pray for faith but shy away from love without embarrassment  
 at heart Hoo  
 Where love takes, that is unknown to faith Hoo  
 O God, keep my love evergreen, Bahu cries for distance  
 with faith Hoo.



## 8

May this body become vision and may I endlessly look at my teacher Hoo  
 Let each pore have thousands of eyes, I may open one and cover  
     the other Hoo  
 Even such ceaseless seeing cannot content me, where else can I go Hoo  
 Meeting my teacher, O Bahu, is like going on millions of  
     pilgrimages Hoo.

## 9

Those who are disrespectful to Him leave this world  
     without higher culture Hoo  
 An earthen vessel never gets cleansed Hoo  
 The enemies of love (Kheras) since beginnings, cannot  
     become passionate lovers (Ranjhas) Hoo  
 Hearts with no longing to meet Him in humility lose both  
     the worlds Hoo.

## 10

Commanded to the earth, I got moved from the heaven  
     to the world Hoo  
 Exiled from Home, I joyfully accepted the command Hoo  
 O world, do not quarrel, I am already baffled at heart Hoo  
 As a stranger from a distant land Bahu aches with ever-increasing  
     separation every instant Hoo.

## 11

If after meeting a saint pain still remains, of what use is the saint Hoo  
 If after meeting a teacher the mind does not receive His command, of  
     what use is the teacher Hoo  
 If an instructor does instruct authentically, why engage  
     that instructor Hoo  
 If martyrdom can win Him, O Bahu, death does not frighten me Hoo.

## 12

Savants boast of their learning, clergymen inflate their egos Hoo  
 These ignorant ones are roaming in the streets, carrying volumes  
     under their arms Hoo

Wherever they smell rewards, they verefully read the  
 Holy text Hoo.  
 They have sold their essence and are robbed of both the  
 worlds Hoo.

13

If one moves forward wholly and patiently, only then is He  
 found Hoo  
 Every pore articulates Him and every breath reads Him Hoo.  
 Wisdom is in recognizing Him in the seen and the unseen, His audible  
 sound rings the soul Hoo  
 O Bahu, the names and graves of those saints remain green  
 who hear the sound Hoo.

14

Since the day I came to Your door to bow Hoo  
 My head is lost to You, I am just unable to go to someone  
 else's court Hoo  
 Those who present the head never mention it, I have  
 Drunk the cup of my passion for You Hoo  
 Bahu dies for them who keep love ever-aflamed Hoo.

15

The living cannot appreciate His martyrs, only those  
 who die know them Hoo  
 Graves have no food and water, you have to spend your  
 essential earnings Hoo  
 Separation from parents and brothers hurts with an added anguish  
 of the grave Hoo  
 O Bahu, only his faith survives who gifts his head to Him Hoo.

16

Those whose lover spells with Alph they never read the Koran Hoo  
 They relax in love, and lose their veils Hoo  
 Heaven and hell turn their salves, and work as their hired  
 servants Hoo  
 Bahu dies for them who enter the realm of union Hoo.

## 17

The breaths of negligence are also the breaths of infidelity,  
 our teacher has taught Hoo  
 This beautiful teaching has opened my eyes, and I have concentrated  
 my mind on Him Hoo  
 I have surrendered the soul to God in my earned love for Him Hoo  
 Those who die before their death, says Bahu, only they attain  
 the end Hoo.

## 18

If you are to remain dead while living, then remain in the  
 dress of a saint Hoo  
 If some one drops his refuse, bear with it like the heap of dirt Hoo  
 Complaint, grievance, criticism, humiliation are to be borne, if they  
 come from a friend Hoo  
 Our thread is in the hand of the creator O Bahu, we have to live  
 as He will Hoo.

## 19

The day my teacher gave me the bowl, I turned carefree Hoo  
 Sleepless nights yield nothing, if the teacher has not initiated Hoo  
 The initiated remain awake and remember Him, criticism of others only  
 estranges the body Hoo  
 Worldly throne is false, O Bahu, only detachment is the  
 true kingdom Hoo.

## 20

Rise my moon and radiate your light, let the stars talk of you Hoo  
 The humble who roam in the streets are the traders of jewels Hoo  
 I wish none to be a traveller, he has always problems to contend Hoo  
 With a clap he is asked to fly away instantly, O Bahu, but I can move  
 on my own Hoo.

## 21

The heart is deeper than a river or the ocean, who can fathom  
 hearts Hoo  
 Boat, storms, oars, boat-drivers all are found in the hearts Hoo

All the seven regions of the earth and skies are erected like a tent  
inside Hoo  
The one who knows the mysteries of heart, O Bahu, can recognize  
God Hoo.

22

It is better to have a black face than having a black heart, if one  
desires to know Him Hoo  
With a black face and a clean heart, the lover  
recognizes the heart Hoo  
It follows and craves for His response Hoo  
The wise flee from the mosques, when their hearts reach the end Hoo

23

Pangs of love are inside, it hurts to share the secret Hoo  
How can they understand our state, those who are obsessed  
with the world Hoo  
The ocean of love is endless, it flows ceaselessly to hinder Hoo  
It is difficult to reach You, says Bahu, we can only intoxicate  
ourselves with Your name Hoo.

24

All recite Invocation orally but none recites the Divine Invocation  
of the heart Hoo  
Where you recite the Invocation of the heart, there is no place  
for the tongue Hoo  
The Invocation of the heart is recited only by lovers Hoo  
My lover has taught me the Invocation of love,  
I am now wedded for ever Hoo.

25

Love has taken me to be a weakling, it is sticking obstinately Hoo  
It has forced itself into my liver, which is a strange act Hoo  
When I looked inside, my lover was sitting there all alone Hoo  
Without meeting a perfect teacher, O Bahu, there is no  
contentment Hoo.

## 26

Love has driven me to the skies, from this earth  
 I have had the glimpse of heaven Hoo  
 O world , refrain, and do not cheat us, we are already baffled Hoo  
 We are aliens, our home is distant, all your temptations are false Hoo  
 O Bahu, those who died before their death, only they found God Hoo

## 27

Those in whose bones love has gone deep, they are silent Hoo  
 Their every pore has millions of tongues, they talk without speech Hoo  
 They wash their hands and feet with His Supreme Name, those  
     who bathe in the river of union Hoo  
 Only then prayers are accepted when lovers recognize  
     each other Hoo.

## 28

My Mecca is the teacher, and quest the pilgrim  
 I have made love as my Kabha Hoo  
 I am always in His presence, exceeding the fixed pilgrimage Hoo  
 He does not leave me even for a moment, if I am eager to meet Him Hoo  
 The teacher is life, O Bahu, it is due to him that He permeates  
     my every pore Hoo.

## 29

The doors of faith are at a height, the way to them is through a  
     narrow hole Hoo  
 You have to evade the (Hindu) priests and the (Muslim) clergy,  
     and make your move invisibly Hoo  
 They obstruct and quarrel, they are enemies of those who  
     suffer in love Hoo  
 O Bahu , let us live where none can claim His love Hoo.

## 30

Neither am I a scholar nor blessed, nor a juror nor a clergyman Hoo  
 Neither my heart goes after hell, nor have I a fulfilling passion for  
     heaven Hoo

Neither I observe thirty fasts, nor am I a pious prayer-sayer Hoo  
 Except union with God, O Bahu, the rest of the world is false Hoo.

31

Neither are they Hindus nor Islamic theists,  
 nor bow in the mosques Hoo  
 They see Him in every breath, those who do not belong  
 to the clergy Hoo  
 From wise they have become impassioned lovers, those who have  
 identified Him Hoo  
 Bahu will die for them who have chosen to contest for love Hoo.

32

This body is the true God's dwelling, look into it  
 with a saint's vision Hoo  
 No need to ask the favour of Khwaja Khizar, the nectar of life is  
 flowing inside Hoo  
 In this darkness kindle the lamp of passion, you may  
 regain the lost Hoo  
 In death they have escaped death, those who have known  
 the secret of God Hoo.

*Davayya*, 16th-17th century

Tr. by Gurbhagat Singh

## Mirza Sahiban

### PILOO

PILOO or Peelu (16th-17th century) is the author of the Kissa about Mirza and Sahiban. He hailed from a Muslim Jat family. His work is available only in parts. More than a love-story, the work gives a realistic account of contemporary life.

1

Sahiban was on a radiant Tuesday born to Khiva Khan.  
 Bards arrived at the Khan's door and welcome ditties sang.  
 From their hearts the house entire blessed the new-born babe.  
 Nursed and nurtured by her maids she did her youth attain.

## 2

In Wanjhal's home was Mirza on an inclement day born.  
His parents did beget him, but God gave him his charm.  
He ripened into a hero, the chieftain of his clan.

## 3

Sahiban studied her lessons, and Mirza learnt Koran.  
Fell in love they in the mosque, to all became it known.  
Do not, "Qazi" , chastize me, nor me thus incriminate.  
For destined I am sure to love, so lessons I forsake.

## 4

To buy some oil Sahiban went into a grocer's shop.  
Verily lost he grip on the balance, measures he forgot.  
Honey it was that he poured out, but oil it was he thought.  
The grocery man his bargain lost, the tiller his oxen lost.  
A horde of *Nangas* froze in Situ, cankered was the lot.  
Friendship of Mirza and Sahiban would forever last.

## 5

Ere did Mirza start his trip, his mother him counsel gave.  
"Ominous is a clash with the Syals for satanic are their ways.  
The Syal women are wicked 'n vile, they spell on strangers cast.  
Savour they the human mire, relish the human heart.  
For a woman don't tather thither, lest you pay with your life  
Stay put and do not step out, dear, accept you my advice!"

## 6

Verily has the daughter of Khiva taken away my heart.  
Long her tresses, complexion fair and hair that's pleated smart.  
Should she even give me poison, gladly would I drink.  
If she'd even lance my heart, from her I will not shrink.  
If I invite my own demise, how others does it sting?

## 7

Mirza was about to leave when Wanjhal to him appealed.  
"Cursed is the camaraderie of women whose mind is in their heels.

Smiling thus start off their romance, tearfully them reveal.  
Don't you step into those quarters where your woman stays.  
Know the wise that none with lucre can honour purchase  
If your don't return with Sahiban we shall feel disgraced.

8

To meet the Syals as Mirza left, his mother implored him thus;  
"Friendship with serpents and lions is not worth a fuss.  
Oil in a cauldron's verity boiling, atop is fire aflame,  
Ran away moses from his death, in front was it again."

9

"Let me state a home-truth, mother", Mirza then replied:  
"In Wanjhal's house did I take birth and so I served his tribe.  
Now does come a call from Sahiban, that I can't ignore.  
If I do survive, I'll come back , don't abandon hope."

10

The hooves of the steed clanked as steel with steel clinks.  
Her tail swayed as a slave fly-whisk swings.  
She pulls with her teeth the turbans, shredding them flings.  
She spares no honour once she upward swings  
Killed she barber, killed she waterer, spilled the thick *sherbet*  
Never do problems seek a license, love can't be forcefully had.  
To combat is not as hard as to keep the word one gave.  
The thief of Sahiban, Mirza , came forever to be her slave.

11

Mirza hurried to Beebo's house, her spinning wheel she stopped.  
If you are my mother's sib, then help me meet Sahiban.  
Then Beebo forthwith left her home, gold-pieces took she four.  
"Sleeping Sahiban, wake up, get up, hurry up and show forth."  
"Who's the youth with turban bright in Beebo's house who stands?"  
"Who but Mirza, the fairest flower who fell into my hands?"

12

How famished your pony, Mirza, how did you it ride?  
Dried up is its frame entire, crow-pecked is its spine!



If none better had your father, you should've borrowed another's  
 Fast and smart indeed are the stallions of the Khan, my father.  
 My folks won't let you escape, if I with you elope  
 Wrench your neck and slash your hand would they on a lonely slope.

## 13

Don't berate my *Bukki* dear, its ears are long and smart.  
 Comely are its hooves and hamstrings, and its tail is dark.  
 No need there's to be concerned if slender is its frame.  
 Those who graze unlimited lands admire its lovely mien.  
 Grazed she is in my father's fields so is well-knit indeed.  
 Butter-oil from ten buffaloes stout add to its fodder we  
 Angels all they fear my *Bukki* as God's afraid of me!  
 Digs her hooves in nether worlds as into the sky she flies.  
 Don't you dare belittle it, *Sahiban*, ride it with delight."

## 14

Drums at the portals sounded, *Sahiban* oiled the hinge.  
 Gathered were all the relatives, raised they dust and din.  
 Left were the empty reticule, perfume and raiments.  
 Left were the chain and locket, basked with ornaments.  
 Rushed in Feroze Dagar, with tidings to *Khiva* went.  
 "Mirza abducted *Sahiban*, the door and latch lament.  
 The Syals he has dishonoured and stained he splendour ours  
 Hence all your stallions saddle, proceed on foot and horse.  
 Pursue the couple eloping, o'ertake the fleeing man.  
 Take oath that you shall slay him before he crowns his plans."

## 15

Love is known to trample men as snow does trample trees.  
 Like a thief the lover sleeps not, for food no relish feels.  
 Mirza and *Sahiban*'s vile affair would not secret remain  
 "Take me to *Danabad*" said *Sahiban*, "lest we're caught and slain."

## 16

"No warrior excels me yet, who'd dare to me confront.  
 Should they challenge me I shall slay all you brethren valiant.

Let me take a sweet little nap under the yond *Jund* tree.  
The next while I'll be in Danabad, for a little while let me sleep.

17

The jat slept under the *Jund* tree stretching a crimson shawl.  
When time comes death overtakes and then it shoots its dart.  
And in your brow it hits you sure, and doth your wits vacate  
Whatso is writ by God Almighty, who can invalidate?  
Colourful rapiers brandish they and mode with speed supreme.  
The steeds are of my father, and my brother the riders seem.  
They may be either after us or, may be, after a game."

18

The sun it sprinkles sparks of time and turns into eve the morn  
At eve the earth gets copper-tinted, dark the firmament.  
"You who robbed another's house, how can you even wink?  
Sleep and your head'd be hit with darts as hammer and anvil clink.  
The Chaudhar Syals they all set out as does set out a throng.  
From all the sides they laid a seige with most impeccable plan.  
A hundred bullets dash by Mirza, arrows around him dart;  
But he can't shake his slumber off nor find his strength to start.

19

"Wake up, you slumbering Mirza now, and pray your arrogance slough  
Brother Samir approaches us incensed on horseback rough.  
May the Lord protect you, Mirza, pray at once wake up!"

20

Mirza got up, saw approaching, Sahiban's brother Samir.  
Fast he pulled out from his quiver an arrow sharp and keen.  
'By God' did he pull and shoot it, spinning it went with speed.  
It felled down from horseback forthwith Sahiban's brother Samir.  
Then said Sahiban "Mirza dear, pray, this my plea concede!  
At once ride us on Bukki yours and Danabad-ward proceed.  
The steeds of Syals man-eaters are, They'll kill you on the way.  
So my Mirza take us forthwith out o' the fiery fray!"

## 21

Mirza was betrayed by destiny, with the Syals it stood.  
 Sharp an arrow came revolving, sunk into Mirza's flash.  
 Forthwith did his soul depart and struck against a tree  
 "Far from fair, O Sahiban, with Syals have sided you!"

## 22

"Unfair were you, Sahiban, my quiver on the tree you hung.  
 With the three hundred arrows that I had all your Syals could be stung  
 Samir I'd have felled with the first one, and Kala with the second dart.  
 The third I should have aimed at whose fiancé' you are.  
 Unturbaned would his hair have flung his comely face to hide."  
 Without his brothers the Jat was slain, none stood on Mirza's side.

## 23

Piloo asks the poet in him "Whither does the world depart?  
 Meets, assemblies, congregations, come together and part  
 Mirza died not just through death, but also through his pride.  
 A handsome youth though Mirza was did into a dark grave slide."

*Mirza Sahiban*, 16th-17th century

*Tr. by J. S. Neki*

## Twenty-Nine Poems

### SHAH HUSSAIN

SHAH HUSSAIN (Śā Husain, 1538-1601) was the most important advocate of Sufism after Sheikh Farid, its progenitor. He stood for overt dissent as distinct from covert consent his predecessor had shown for the teachings of the Muslim theologians. This might have been due to the fact that rather than from birth, he was a Muslim by conversion. As a result the residual elements of his indigenous culture remained, lurking beneath his adopted religion.

Due to this orientation, Shah Hussain believed in God being immanent rather than transcendent as taught in *The Koran*. He discounted fear and obedience as the modes for attaining union with the Lord. Love and adoration seemed to him more veritable for this purpose. To articulate this point of view, Shah Hussain mostly wrote lyrical compositions namely *Kafian*. one hundred and sixty four; in all, they are composed according to various *ragas*.

In these compositions the interlocutor is invariably a maiden. From her parental house standing for the mundane world, she is intent upon going to her lover's abode, a folkloric expression for the spiritual horizon. Reluctant in the beginning, she becomes firm once the past significance, the present meaning and future value of this journey dawn upon her mind. Then she brushes aside all the constraints which obstruct her from without. The restraints, which inhibit her from within, can also not put any hurdle in her way. The indeterminate hazards she is likely to encounter also fail to dissuade her from undertaking this journey.

The awareness of all these covert constraints, overt restraints and indeterminate hazards, becomes her forte. In one measure she perceives the whole futility of the world. This perception impels her to feel one with the legendary *Heer* whose love for Ranjha became a subject for countless *kissas* i.e. narrative compositions in Punjabi. To award veracity to the lover-beloved union, *Heer* relentlessly stood against all social customs, legal prescriptions and religious precepts sanctioning the efficacy of marriage through Kinship.

Become one with the legendary heroine, the interlocutor in the poetic compositions of Shah Hussain, discounts the whole discourse of power to which the redoubtable scriptures in general and *The Koran* in particular owed their complicity. To be one with the Lord, she is ready to bear with all abuses, reprimands and insults which the people without any thought to the contrary, may hurl upon her head. Bearing with them all, she comes up with a discourse of love looking askance on power and prowess, property and wealth, customs and precepts.

Rooted in Punjabi folklore and culture, Shah Hussain's discourse of love exercises external charm on the minds of listeners and no less so of readers. The efficacy of its reception extends far beyond the veracity of its production. No wonder, it carries the message of liberty-cum-liberation for the reading public, in particular, of the Western Punjab, a constituent of Pakistan now. Naturally, almost all the outstanding singers, both male and female, have lent their voice to Shah Hussain's poetic corpus in their distinctive ways.

1

My *Charkha* is crimson, of red hue;  
Thus hued are its supports as well.  
Past is the time for my murshid to come  
So tears as rain run down my face  
And hapless am I with weeping.  
Without demur I run my *Charkha*  
Where all have flocked for hair-plaiting.  
But none has turned my grief to share,

And none has come for company to give.  
 Filled with cotton is the basket that  
 My parents have put on my head,  
 All is futile, holds Hussain, the seer,  
 Except the Lord that sustains for ever.

Wake up my mind now  
 The whole night is past,  
 This life uncertain to last  
 Is like staying at an inn.  
 The body is asunder from the mind,  
 Like a leaf fallen from the tree.  
 So holds Hussain, the seer;  
 Around is the morning again.

## 3

Let me dally, O mother mind!  
 But who will dally with me now?  
 I, insect-like, look mean,  
 Heart all atremble with fear.  
 The excellent Lord looking so fair  
 Will, who knows, accept me or not.  
 Fake the universe, perishable the world,  
 Gone waste is all my fair youth,  
 To leisure is as my life bound;  
 The ordained will come to pass.

Thus holds Hussain, the seer:  
 The ordained is bound to happen,  
 Bound is one to die at last,  
 Penitent for the time past.

## 4

Struck with pangs, my heart  
 Has turned all lifeless now;  
 Those who lakhs and crores amass  
 Are all penitent at last.  
 Damned be the pure white blanket;  
 Better for me is the beggarly cover.  
 For those who in congregation sit  
 Have their minds with discretion filled.

So holds Hussain, the seer :  
Unrewarded go the callous people.

5

O Lord! I am Yours in short  
Drop me not from Your Mind, O Lord,  
Deprived of all as I am now.  
Without any merit of the sort  
I draw on Your Blessing only,  
Keep me as You deem it, O Lord.  
Tied to Your Apron now,  
Exalting calm can come  
From Your Look Benign.  
So holds Hussain, the seer,  
I am at the door Your guarding canine.

6

Go where my love resides  
And tell him of my humble way:  
Were I a *jogin* glued to fire lit  
Dying with severe pangs of you  
With nothing but union to revive me.  
Wrenched at night and wretched during day  
The only thing for me is just to die:  
With my hair dishevelled down  
I, a love-lorn damsel of yore,  
Wandering in the jungle or by riverside,  
Can't in my muffled modesty cry.  
Thus holds Hussain, the seer:  
I go without sleep all day and night.

7

Why should I ask for release  
When Love holds me by the arm?  
In the dark night of clouds and rain  
Hard is to live of him deprived,  
Who may then cast one aside,  
Only they, touched to the marrow, know  
What connotations in Love abide.

Futile to dig a well in the wild  
 To water the un-sprouting rice.  
 One day you will leave behind  
 The sacks you fill to the brim,  
 Thus holds Hussain, the seer:  
 Look into Love's eyes without blink.

## 8

A day will dawn for you to feel  
 Sire's lanes have into illusion turned,  
 Drones have flown away from flowers  
 Carrying leaves, twigs and all.  
 Only they know who bear affliction  
 For others it is only an easy talk.  
*Qazi* holds no solace to one distraught  
 For he talks of things in ordinay vein.  
 Accounted for are only the nights  
 Spent in the intimacy of the Lord,  
 A weaver by caste with Hussain as his name,  
 He suffers insults from those who flaunt their might.

## 9

Abide by the Lord and thus abide  
 Bearing evils and abuses on the head  
 In countless measure hurled.  
 Not to utter a cry though the head,  
 Multilated, from the body be sundered,  
 To reveal the intimacy of the heart  
 Only to him whom grace has inured  
 Futile is to pull down from roots.  
 The hallowed tree in the courtyard grown,  
 Thus holds Hussain the seer:  
 Noble is to withdraw for life in peace.

## 10

Pleasures don't last long  
 Futile is to take pride in pelf and youth  
 For they the wisest betray.  
 All the playmates have departed

With whom passed childhood in play.  
 Leaving the sire's courtyard behind  
 They have at the in-law's arrived,  
 So have dropped from view  
 The lanes which the sires laid,  
 Thus holds Hussain, the seer:  
 Perform noble deeds as aspired.

11

Look not at my drawbacks,  
 You who is kindness incarnate  
 Are you the Lord providing us all,  
 Nothing is veiled from you.  
 Knowing well my mind's state  
 Who should you my drawbacks reveal?  
 Wise and generous as you are.  
 Provide me protection in things all,  
 To you I have ardently confided  
 What deeply ails my heart.  
 Provider and deliverer in one,  
 You without recompense bestow all.  
 The river of grace that you are,  
 Fill the beggarly bowl to the brim.  
 Thus supplicates Hussain the seer,  
 By hailing all that you do:  
 Pang and pain keep away from him  
 Who daily hails the Lord.

12

May you forget not the divine  
 In the seer's prayer,  
 Forget all but the divine  
 Which is not to share.  
 Offer of buttered corn to kins but  
 Stale remnant to the seer!  
 Gold and silver stay not forever,  
 But love is beyond smear.  
 With others you remain all agog  
 Why from the Lord this veil is here?  
 No regret for you to bear,  
 For better it is to swear



Both by the Lord and the seer.  
 The youth that makes you vain  
 Gets reduced to ashes here,  
 Thus holds Hussain, the seer:  
 Why feel vain when death is so near?

## 13

Soaked are four corners of my wimple  
 With tears shed from the eyes,  
 I blame the supports in vain  
 Myself ignorant of spinning.  
 He assured me of return  
 But a full year has passed in waiting,  
 Confined to a dark dungeon  
 By dear ones I feel deserted  
 You have, O black stag,  
 The boundaries of my fields grazed.

## 14

Brief is life in the world  
 In worldly affairs to engage,  
 Who dare lay claim to horses,  
 Elephants, mansions and all,  
 Gone are *mullahs* and *qazis*,  
 Nowhere is soldiery to be seen:  
 The world is ephemeral, O love,

The best is with the Lord<sup>1</sup> to get akin.  
 Thus holds Hussain, the seer:  
 False is all the life's way.

## 15

Night verges towards its end  
 But unsolicited is the Lord,  
 Blessed is the consort who  
 The Lord in loving embrace holds.  
 Pitch-dark is the thatched hut  
 With no lamp or wick besides,  
 Angels of death drag from the arm  
 With none to get along.

The ill-disposed kept asleep  
 But the well-disposed woke up at once,  
 Only she is disposed to remain awake  
 Whose innermost self is with Him in tune.  
 Thus holds Hussain, the seer:  
 Kinship with the lord holds  
 Through the prayer addressed  
 Or through wakefulness at night.

16

Why remain reserved,  
 When brief is life in the world?  
 Death lurks on all sides  
 With life guaranteed by none.  
 Sure it is to depart headlong,  
 For none is to live for ever.  
 Thus holds Hussain, the seer:  
 Death draws thralling ropes.

17

I am ardent to go to *Ranja's* rugged hamlet  
 Expecting someone to keep company.  
 Falling at his feet and seeking amends.  
 By myself I had to go all alone.  
 Deep the stream and antique the boat  
 And tigers roaring at the banks.  
 If someone brings news of the loved ones  
 I shall as reward give rings of gold.  
 Pang at night is inflicted by the dear ones,  
 Raw are the wounds inflicted by the dear ones.  
*Ranja*, my love, is physician known,  
 My body has ache of the exceptional sort.

Thus holds Hussain, the seer:  
 Only that a message comes from the Lord.

18

Know yourself, O being!  
 Easy will be union with the Lord

If this knowledge dawns on you.  
Forts of gold and corridors of silver  
Are tombs without the Lord.  
Angels of death intrigues on you  
Though you know or know it not.  
A yard and a half is all you do own  
Why beyond a measure, then, exert.  
Gold coins, treasury and all  
Are transitory, of no import at all.  
Thus pleads Hussain, the seer,  
For ego and pride to forsake.

## 19

How graceful are the loved ones in their abode!  
Beyond restraints and constraints  
In the labyrinth they wallow.  
Some are hungry, others thirsty,  
Some are awake and others asleep,  
And some are wreaking havoc though,  
All know the secret well enough.  
All the loved ones are so alike  
conjoint by some divine decree,  
One who may nail them down  
Is the discreet one, Lord's own.

Thus holds Hussain, the seer:  
Those unabashed go distraught.

## 20

Let us, O girls, dance together,  
Let us, O girls, meditate on the Lord.  
Enjoy playing in the sire's lanes now;  
Mothers won't let you do so ever again.  
We yearn for a union with the Lord;  
The idle ones in backbiting indulge,  
But for union with the dear we aspire a lot.  
Our playmates are in splendid palaces put,  
All their wishes converging on play,  
With cotton thread yet to weave, we have;  
Groom's companions at the door.

Swings hang from high *peepal* trees  
 All are given to whirl in them,  
 In keeping with their tender ages,  
 Thus holds Hussain, the seer:  
 All are to leave the world on dying  
 Why not cast a look inward then?

21

On what merit to cross the deep stream ahead!  
 Dark is the night and arduous the journey.  
 None is there to keep me company.  
 I am at dagger's drawn with the sailor;  
 All my playmates have tasted love,  
 Only I remain of all that deprived.  
 Thus holds Hussain, the seer:  
 I wait for the time gone utterly awry.

22

*Sheikh* the epithet we want for ourselves,  
 At home to sing songs of divine bliss,  
 Feed ourselves on morsels begged,  
 And restrict ourselves only to this task.

Love is support for the seers only;  
 Its mystery is beyond measure,  
 Its eternal charm is reserved for us,  
 Who intently meditate upon God.

We don't pray to any other Being.  
 Reciting always the name of the Lord,  
 We have only you for our support.  
 In you are we totally involved.

Love is within and without us.  
 Tangible is our love for the *murshid*.  
 The only wage required of us  
 Of death in life as the prospect.  
 A *murid* is guaranteed for each *pir*.  
 For the whole world is ridden with misery.

We are intent upon dance divine:  
 Holds Shah Hussain, the singular seer.

## 23

My mind is set on the callous One  
Who lords over the world and beyond.  
*Qazis* and *mullahs* give counsel  
Of a true and discreet way of life,  
That hardly accords with love.  
*Ranja's* cottage is across the river;  
Whom to meet is essential per promise:  
So I beg the sailor to carry me across.  
Thus holds Hussain, the seer:  
We forsake the world in death;  
For God we are ultimately to engage.

## 24

It is through the heart's blood that I make amends  
Solely for the pleasures of friends!  
For you I turned my heart to pieces  
While it is not deserving of you,  
This is all I can offer, beyond which  
What I afford is only a bowl of water.  
Sleep doesn't at all come into my eyes;  
Cruel pangs trouble me as I lie.  
In volumes despatched in your name  
It is my own heart I recognize.  
Pining at night and running during the day,  
I feel a blade piercing my eyes,  
Cast a glance at me some time,  
And see the hopeless state that is mine.  
As is his wont my love behaves  
Strange in the ambience pining begets.  
My mind is turned to you day and night  
To deliver me as fit you may find.  
It is for you I wander far and wide;  
Searching for you on foot in the jungle,  
My tear-filled eyes have this appeal to make.  
I, the hapless one, is not to blame at all.  
Pains and pangs have so conspired,  
No succour from father or in-law is there.  
It is on you that all my hopes converge  
Take me therefore in your custody now.

Thus holds Hussain, the seer:  
Strange are the ways of those who pine,  
With pang hanging heavy over me  
'Ahead lies truth' so I realize.

25

Those who have the Lord on their side  
Have no cause for worry, O people!  
Noble are those who turn to God  
Nurturing His love for long, O people!  
Carrying love's basket on my head  
On each door I knock, O people!  
Thus holds Hussain, the seer;  
Love's peep gets ordained, O people!  
Those who have the Lord on their side  
Have no cause for worry, O people!  
Thus ordained I have none of that, O people!

26

Mention of the in-laws, O my mother,  
Bring it not to me.  
I am one with my *Ranja*.  
False is the in-law's desire for me.  
"I am gone lunatic" say the people  
For having *Ranja* as my groom.  
Thus holds Hussain, the seer:  
The secret is in Lord's reach.

27

Whom to tell, O my mother,  
My state of pang and pain,  
Smoulders within love of my Lord  
That turns crimson when stroked.  
Piercing thorns have driven me mad,  
With pang that haunts all the time,  
Bread of miseries with salt of thorns  
Is baked on the word of sighs.  
Roaming about in the wild jungle  
I have yet to find my *Lord*,  
Thus holds Hussain, the seer;  
Joy does in Lord's union thrive.

28

Why did I come to spin  
 When not a string is drawn?  
 Dallying drew me at once  
 And fondly I put the wheel away.  
 I had brought rolls to spin,  
 But the calf gulped them away;  
 Others have rolls to spin  
 I, the hapless, have cotton beside.  
 Others have spun in part,  
 But I have largely remained raw.  
 Discreet women, holds Hussain, the seer:  
 Seek solace in Lord's embrace.

29

None else is welcome then,  
 When Love is the criterion there.  
 Besmeared with ashes, some go in trance,  
 Some bare-bodied wander in the wild,  
 With no pang animating their breast.  
 Some remain awake at night  
 Others go almost staring in winter,  
 But none gets any response from you.  
 Some recite oracles from scriptures  
 And employ words for disputation;  
 But that is too trite a thing indeed.  
 Only if you knock at *murshid's* door  
 And bring beggings of love besides,  
 Do you get an inkling where Lord abides.  
 Thus holds Hussain, the seer:  
 "Love begets love" is a dictum divine.

*Kafian*, 16th century

Tr. by Tejwant Singh Gill

## Selections

### GURU TEGH BAHADUR

GURU TEGH BAHADUR (1621-1675) was the ninth Sikh Guru. Fifty-nine *padas* and fifty-seven *shlokas* of his are included in the Granth Sahib. In his poems he pleads for a life of renunciation with total dedication to Dharma.

I

Sang you not the Lord's Praises  
Hollow became your life  
Says Nanak: So love the Lord  
As fish the waters love.

\*

Why are you in evil entrenched?  
Never for a while detached!  
Says Nanak: You dwell on the Lord  
That you noose of Yama escape.

\*

Wasted away is all your youth  
And age hath you overta'en  
Says Nanak: Dwell in your Lord  
For life away would hasten.

\*

Old you became, but learnt you naught  
Death knocks now at your door.  
Says Nanak: O crazy man,  
Why not remember the Lord?

\*

Wealth and woman, and all possession  
You think belong to you.  
Reckon this true that none of these  
(In the yond) 'll your company be.

\*

One unmoved by pleasure and pain  
Egoism, attachment and greed,  
O, my mind, know you him.  
As the Lord's image indeed.



He who's above praise and dispraise,  
 To whom are gold and iron alike  
 Says Nanak: hearken my mind!  
 Sure has he liberated this sprite.

\*

Who nor joyed nor sorrowful is  
 Friend and foe alike who deems.  
 Says Nanak : hearken my mind!  
 Who but him liberated seems.

\*

He who strikes not terror in others  
 Nor to terror he himself bows.  
 Says Nanak: know this you,  
 Such's the one who reality knows.

\*

He who had discarded,  
 Unconcerned with the world became,  
 Says Nanak; O my mind,  
 It's the one with Destiny awake.

\*

He who has left desire and Maya,  
 And became from the world detached  
 Says Nanak: the Lord in him abides  
 He ever beholds the Lord.

\*

He who has forsaken his ego  
 And has his Lord attained  
 Says Nanak: there is no doubt  
 That he has liberation gained.

Reckon this world as but a dream,  
A show or just a play  
Says Nanak: except for the Lord  
Nothing in it ever will stay.

\*

Just as a bubble on the waters  
Does rise and bloat and burst  
Says Nanak: listen, O my mind,  
So does this world vanish.

\*

The head is shaking, the feet are faltering  
The eyes, of their sight, are devoid  
Such, Nanak, became one's state.  
Yet one cherished not the Lord.

\*

Worry would be just if what so happened  
Could be wished away.  
Says Nanak : in this world,  
Nothing does for ever stay.

\*

Whatso's created, must also vanish  
If not today, perishes it tomorrow  
Says Nanak: forsake your involvements  
And sing the praises of the Lord.

\*

My power is shattered, fettered am I,  
Nothing whatever avails.  
Says Nanak: O Lord, my support,  
Save me as this elephant you saved.

My power returns, my trammels relent,  
 My effort's again of avail  
 Says Nanak: all's in this Your hand,  
 You come, O Lord, to my aid.

\*

Friends and mates have me forsaken  
 And none with me endured.  
 Says Nanak: in this dark hour  
 You are my sole support.

\*

What shall survive is the Name Divine  
 The Lord or holy men,  
 But, says Nanak; rare in the world  
 Are those who Him adore and ken,

\*

When he prospers, Man's befriended  
 In misery none comes near,  
 Says Nanak: dwell on our Lord  
 Who till the end'll be your peer.

\*

Birth after birth I wandered about  
 But fear of death did stay.  
 Says Nanak: by dwelling on the Lord  
 You'll live in a fearless way.

\*

What you should have done you didn't  
 Greed-entrapped you tossed.  
 Says Nanak: what use is crying,  
 O fool, when the hour is passed?

\*

One thing it is that a man does seek,  
Quite another that he'd get.  
Continuous designing cunning for others  
Himself in a noose gets stuck.

\*

The world entire is but a beggar,  
The Lord alone does give.  
Says Nanak: dwell on the Lord  
And your desire fulfil.

\*

Just as a dog in no case would  
Quit his master's door,  
Thatwise single-minded, Nanak,  
You your Lord adore!

\*

O Saints! egoism from your mind discard  
From lust and violence and impious company  
Ever you should depart.  
Pleasure and pain who takes alike  
Credit and disgrace as well,  
Joy and sorrow who both transcends  
He can the Essence tell.  
Praise and Calumny who both eschews,  
Nirvana does chase.  
Hard is the way, but following the Guru  
Some rare one would it take.

\*

O Saints! the Lord creation does raise  
Though some die, others think they 're deathless,  
Doesn't it you amaze?  
Gripped by lust and wrath and attachment,

Shunning the Image Divine,  
Mortal frame we deem eternal  
Though it's a dream of the night.  
All that we see is destined to depart  
Just like the shadow of a cloud,  
"The world is false" cries Nanak aloud  
And seeks the shelter o' the Lord.

\*

O my stolid mind!  
Of falling into sin beware!  
His refuge you seek,  
To the humble who's kind  
And dispels every fear!  
His Name, lauded by Vedas and Puranas,  
Enshrine you in your heart.  
Cherish His Name, the holiest of holy  
So that your sins depart.  
Feign would you find the human form again  
Seek now some way of deliverance.  
Says Nanak: Lord, the clement Lord,  
And cross the sea of Existence.

\*

O Saints! 'tis hard to harness the mind.  
Restless it is, caught in desire and it would not be stilled.  
Wrath titanic holds the heart,  
And senses it has benumbed.  
The jewel of wisdom by it is robbed,  
Nor has ever it influence.  
Of their efforts have Yogis despaired  
And the chanters of laudations too.  
Only when the Lord does shower His Grace,  
Would friendship with the Lord accrue.

\*

O my mind! how did you crazy become?  
Each new day crops short your life

But greed has made you a bum;  
 This your body which you hold as yours  
 And your mansion and your comely wife  
 None of these will with you stay,  
 O reason you in your mind.  
 The jewel of your life you've gambled away.  
 The Lord you didn't venerate.  
 Even for a moment Him you didn't adore.  
 Such a waste of your life you make.  
 Says Nanak: He alone is happy who sings the praise of the Lord.  
 The rest of the world is masked in illusion  
 And gripped by the deadly dread.

•

O my mother! the wealth of Divine Name have I earned.  
 My mind is no longer rushing around,  
 And has in poise been stilled.  
 Illusion and avarice have left my being,  
 And spotless illumination dawned.  
 Greed and attachment now touch it not,  
 Devotion of the Lord has it grasped.  
 The delusion of many births has departed,  
 As the jewel of Name I attained.  
 Desire entire from my mind has vanished,  
 And in the joy of the self am absorbed.  
 One whose's pleased the Treasure of Grace.  
 He does the Lord's praises sing.  
 Such wealth, says Nanak: indeed,  
 Some godmen only attain.

•

Why are you deluded in false greed, O man?  
 Nothing has yet been lost, wake up!  
 Know this world but as a dream.  
 In an instant will it vanish,—true it deem,  
 The Divine friend by you does abide.  
 Day and night to Him you turn.  
 At the last moment shall He help you.  
 Says Nanak: His laudation you sing.

•

O my mind! what 'll your condition be?  
 Harkened you not the Name of the Lord,  
 Evil pleasures you always sought,  
 Never from them did flee!  
 Born though a human, never for a moment  
 Did you remember your God.  
 Caught in carnal, sensual pleasures  
 Verily you got firmly fettered.  
 Nanak the Slave does thus proclaim  
 This whole world is but a dream.  
 Why not, then, dwell on your Lord,  
 Maya is only whose bondmaid?

•

Dwell, O man, dwell on your Lord.  
 This is the right occupation.  
 Your fellowship with Maya discard,  
 Reckon the joys of the world as false,  
 Verily, these are mere deception.  
 Your riches are but a pleasant dream;  
 What for then do proud you feel?  
 Even the kingdom of the world is but a wall of sand.  
 Says Nanak: your body shall fall.  
 Just as your yesterday had a finale,  
 So too will your t'morrow end.

From *Gurbani*, 17th century

Tr. by J.S. Neki

## Yusuf-Zulaikha

HAFIZ BARKHURDAR

HAFIZ BARKHURDAR (17th century) was born in the village Musalmani during the reign of Shah Jahan. His kissa *Yusuf-Zulaikha* was written in 1676 at the command of Nawab Jafar Khan. It narrates the well-known romantic story of Zulaikha's love for the slave Yusuf whom she first saw in a dream.

1

Whatso I say, it little conveys, it hardly eulogy makes,  
 And lest applause reproach becomes, in fear my body quakes.

Infirm my thought can praise Him not, so I procrastinate.  
 He who flowers in all Creation, us too did create.  
 God Himself the moulder Prime, Himself He Nature cast.  
 How may the humble folk Him praise, how can they Him applaud?  
 The All-inclusive, Unapproachable, who can Him describe?  
 Limits we must not e'er transgress, and poison not imbibe!

2

Taimoos begot a daughter cute, and festive was his place.  
 Princess Zulaikha of the West had just a fairy face.  
 And none her beauty could define, beyond account was it;  
 A moon in face, an oak in stance, and eyes two lamps lit.  
 Eyebrows and lashes, bow and arrows, teeth *champa* buds.  
 Slender her waist, neck as a goblet's, fingers as lentil pods.  
 Her chin as an apple, wrists as *alif*, a clove won't her mouth admit.  
 Complexion soft and red as a rose, did make the fairies quit.  
 Her forelocks spiralling on her face coiled as a meek reptile.  
 Her beauty fathom I cannot, though pages may I write.

3

Brighter than day a night it was, the stars on a watch did seem.  
 No thief awake, no barking dog, and no watchman did scream.  
 Pillows of silk, with feathers stuffed, and wool-carpeted the floors  
 The bedspread of muslin fragrant with musk, and on it flowers strewn  
 On it care-free slept Zulaikha, blossomed her face did gleam,  
 And then her inner eye did ope, and so she had a dream!  
 In it up sprang the face of Yusuf, put her in a daze.  
 What was to happen, happened, and separation set her ablaze.  
 Yusuf's dignity struck her mad, yet prudent did she stay,  
 And said: "If they could know his bent, slave-girls would pine away.  
 O my God, was he an angel or the heavenly moon?  
 Or descended into my Destiny humankind's bloom?"  
 And, then, bewitched her eyes she oped as the dream  
     from view retired  
 She wrung her hands and flapped her palms, her girl-mates the  
     reason enquired  
 Then all around she cast her glance, but Yusuf she couldn't perceive.  
 A pang mysterious sprang in her soul, her fate she couldn't believe.  
 Nor would she eat nor even drink, and pale became her cheeks  
 This virgin in her early youth was struck with grief so deep.



No peace, no sleep, no rest she had, nor would she laugh but weep.  
 Feign did she know his name or place, if asked, she would not speak.  
 Whereso the arrow of the love-god strikes, no rupture  
     would you find.  
 But the sparking point would sting the flesh and spirit and  
     soul and mind,  
 Though love inside her was ablaze, no smoke would it reveal,  
 But how cold it be secret kept, for straws don't fire conceal,  
 Tears would roll out from her eyes, and sighs from heart proceed,  
 And both these slanderers let the world her occult love perceive.

## 4

Till midnight did she stay in tears, then slumberous did she seem.  
 Head on her knees, her eyes closed, came Yusuf in her dream.  
 The self-same face, the self-same form, the self-same manner meet,  
 As soon as Zulaikh saw him fell she at his feet.  
 A bowl in hand, a scarf o'er shoulders, heart-broken she spake,  
 "Love-lorn my frame in vice is caught, and my bones, they break.  
 I ask you in the name of God, and truly tell me that  
 Are you a goblin, or an angel, or a man, or what?  
 Are you a spring of nectar pure, or a moon from the azure sky?  
 Are you a jewel better than rubies—pray, identify!  
 My gown and flesh and soul and sprite have been on fire set.  
 It looks as if I see aflame an empty nuptial bed."

The form mysterious forward stepped and said in voice serene:  
 "Am nor oceanic, nor uranic, but an earthly being"  
 To get the answer to your longing, ope your psyche's gate  
 The ardour you express thus, it mirrors my own state.  
 "This love-sickness bilateral is" mid sighing Yusuf spoke.  
 But stranger than the dream she found her state when she awoke.

Once again her quest began, her tears welled up again.  
 She pulled her hair and flapped her hands and couldn't  
     herself contain.  
 Chains won't bind her, threats won't frighten, love she won't eschew.  
 Crazed by it she went beyond all reason and review.  
 Ashen her skin and pale her face, no more was seen her glow,  
 Fettered in feet and strangled in throat, she lamented loud and low.  
 This is what one may conclude: who loves does love obtain;  
 Yet, from poor Zulaikha's eyes, tears of blood did rain.

5

Then God did hear Zulaikha's prayers, a third event occurred:  
 She, in obeisance, shut her eyes, a dream then, in her stirred.  
 In that she Yusuf found again, his sight lit up her eyes,  
 She found out he was there on sale, "I would, for millions, buy."  
 She ran up, held his gown and cried, "He is my thief indeed.  
 My palace he visited, stole my heart, and vanished with a speed.  
 Inured to thievery, robbery, devilry, he's deceitful ever.  
 And me he killed without a sword or bow and arrow or dagger.  
 Nor he engenders fear of God nor mercy in his heart.  
 Nor does he care for ruling kings, nor does he care for aught.  
 He neither tells where he comes from, nor does his name declare,  
 He comes at night, at night departs, deceives you while you glare."

6

There a show fantastic was where thronged Egypt entire.  
 "Whatever is lost, if lost for ever, foment bereavement dire."  
 And Yusuf was on sale in the show, his brokers in a spell:  
 "We do not deal in any gems, but man for value sell!"  
 And Virgin girls from every home would bid after bid raise.  
 An old wench, for a cotton skein, came Yusuf to purchase.  
 She was enamoured with the youth who had been put on sale.  
 She thought, "I might a bargain make, and leave for ever a tale."  
 But, then, to quell this thought she said : "Who can a prophet sell?  
 Though, sure, some of our Prophets dear victims to mishaps fell!"

And heard Zulaikha too of Yusuf whom she in dream had marked,  
 Pretending going a hunting, then, towards the woods she marched.  
 That pandemonium she too heard, but comrades to disarm,  
 Said, "Go and check what happens there; what for does Egypt swarm?"  
 Then slid the curtain of her litter, her prized jewel she spied.  
 She thanked the Heavens for happiness hers had all her grief belied  
 And suddenly tight her skirt became, joy did her girth expand.  
 By God's grace, for whom she sighed was so near, close at hand!

7

Led by the hand by Aziz, Yusuf to the place came.  
 And when Zulaikha him beheld, dumb-founded became.  
 "Is it again a dream, O God, or am I full awake?  
 What shame if my eyes I open, it turns out a fake;  
 Three times this gift I got in dreams, so dream ending I dread,  
 For when I woke there was no one but me alone in bed.

Lest again it happens that way, I frustrated be,  
I shall keep me blind-folded, so Yusuf mine I see."

## 8

"Am dying of thirst although I hear a swollen ocean thunder!  
A palmful o' water and live I become, this chance I must  
not squander.

Without a palmful does Zulaikha smoulder like a wet dung-cake;  
The o' this world is simply this: if give we not, we cannot take!  
Yusuf mine! I did confide in you my tale entire.  
You're the remedy if my sickness, so I you desire!"

Yusuf, God's dearest friend, on God he pondered ever,  
Day and night Him he remembered, prayer forgot he never.  
"Save me God fro' the sin o' adultery." Caught was Yusuf wi' dread;  
So he did not lift his eyes, kept hanging his head.  
She pleaded, he answered not; nor did he speak or mutter.  
To dismembered, poor Zulaikha, not a word did utter.  
"Don't O damsel, trust your dream, of falsehood blame me not;  
Munificent vision is for the kings, the slaves it never sought."  
While she implored, he did not bother, much she was dismayed;  
Love-bereaved, melancholy-hearted, tearfully, she prayed!

*Yusuf-Zulaikha,*

*Tr. by J.S.Neki*

## Janam Sakhi

JANAM SAKHI refers to biographical or hagiographical accounts of Guru Nanak in Punjabi. The various versions of Janam Sakhi are grouped as: *Puratan Janam Sakhi*, *Meherban Janam Sakhi*, *Bala Janam Sakhi* and *Mani Singh Janam Sakhi*. Naturally they overlap. Excerpts from *Puratan Janam Sakhi* and *Meherban Janam Sakhi*; *Guru Nanak Devji* (ascribed to Sodhi Meherban) and *Bhai Mani Singh Janam Sakhi* are given below :

## I

## Ancient Janam Sakhi

ANONYMOUS

## 1

*Baba Nanak* was born on the 3rd of the bright half of the lunar month of Vaishakh early morning, when a quarter of the night still remained. Unstruck melodies

Unstruck melodies sounded in the Court of the Lord. Three hundred thirty million gods and goddesses made their obeisance. Sixty-four yogis, fifty-two heroes, six *jatis*, eighty-four *siddhas*, nine *nathas* also made obeisance, because a great *bhakta* for the salvation of the world had been born. "Him we must salute!"

At that time Kalu Khatri Bedi (Baba Nanak's father), used to reside in Talwandi of Rai Bhoi Bhatti. There itself was Guru Nanak born and grew up to play with other children. But his outlook was different from that of the other children. He would be absorbed in meditation upon God. When he was 5 years old, he began to talk of things esoteric. Whatever he talked was always well-considered, and of great satisfaction to all. The Hindus would say that a *devata* has taken birth. The Muslims would say that a *Sadiq* (man of faith) has descended.

## 2

When it came to his mind, he went to Sultanpur and met Jairam; Jairam was much pleased. Said he, "Who says there is anything the matter with Nanak? Nanak is absolutely fine." He went to the court of Daulat Khan and petitioned before him saying, "Hail O' Nawab! from his home, a brother-in-law of mine who has come to stay with me would like to come over and pay his respects to you." Jairam respectfully said, "Sir, his name is Nanak."

Then the Khan said, "He appears to be a good, honest gentleman. Engage him in my works." Guru Nanak, upon this, gave a smile. The Khan bestowed upon him a robe of honour. After that Guru Nanak and Jairam went back home. Guru Nanak then began to work. He worked with such devotion that he pleased everyone. Whoso saw him exclaimed, "Wonderful; what a fine gentleman!" They all comended him to the Nawab. The Khan too was pleased at this. Of whatever remuneration Nanak received, he spent the very minimum on his personal needs; the rest he gave away in God's Name. Every night he would sing the Lord's praises. In this, his companion, Mardana, the minstrel, who had come with him from Talwandi, joined him. Whoever else came down from his village, he would introduce to the Nawab, and get him some service. Thus, they also began to earn their livelihood by the grace of Guru Nanak, and were happy. When meals were served from the Guru's kitchen, everyone flocked thither. Every night they would perform *Kirtan* and sing the Lord's praises. A quarter of the night still remaining, the Baba would repair to the river for a bath. At dawn, he would change into fresh clothes, fix a mark on his forehead, and go to the court to keep accounts.

## 3

During a subsequent odyssey, he happened to visit Sheikh Sajjan. His house was on the wayside. There he had provided both a *thakurdwara* for the Hindus, and a mosque for the Muslims. If a Hindu happened to come that way, Sajjan would give him shelter; if a Muslim came by, to his needs would he also minister. He would take them into his house ostensibly to provide them rest. But in actual fact he would kill them by throwing them into a well. However, with the rising of the sun, he would spread a prayer-mat and sit on it with a rosary in hand. When the Baba and Mardana went to him, he also served them very well. In confidence, he said to his own men, "He seems to have much wealth on him which he seems to be hiding somewhere on himself. The glow on his face betrays his opulence. By no means would he be an empty-handed man. He is only deluding us by wearing the appearance of a *fakir*." When the night descended, he told the Guru and Mardana, "Sirs, it should be time for you to go to bed now." But the Baba said, "Before we go to bed, I would like to sing a hymn in the praise of my Lord." "Surely, Sir!" said Sajjan, "But please hurry up, as the night is advancing fast. The Baba then asked Mardana to play the rebec. Mardana struck raga suhi on his rebec and the Baba began to sing :

Bright sparkles the bronze  
 Rub it and comes off its black.  
 Wash it as you may, its impurity goes not.  
 They alone are our friends who stand by us in the Yond;  
 And when the account we have to render  
 There they stand (as a pledge for us).  
 Houses and mansions polished. From without  
 They crash and present a vacuity yawning within,  
 The heron, draped in white, abides at a pilgrim place  
 But devours life without mercy, how can he claim his purity?  
 My body like a Simmal tree in vain majesty deludes people,  
 But as its fruits, so my merits are of no avail,  
 The blind one goes uphill on a winding path  
     with a load o'er his head  
 But his eyes discern not the path. Where shall he reach?  
 What use is service, or merit or wisdom?  
 Cherish the Lord's Name, that all your bonds get snapped.

Then Sajjan looked at the Baba and was overtaken by his rectitude. He then pondered: "It is my own sins that are reflected in this hymn." He got up and knelt before the Baba; kissed his feet and said, "Sir, forgive my sins". The Baba said, "Sheikh Sajjan, in the Lord's court forgiveness can be had through two things." The Seikh asked, "What are they?" Guru

Nanak in his grace said, "Tell us the truth first." Then the Seikh said, "I have committed many sins..." and began to narrate the story of the murders he had committed. The Guru then told him, "Whatever you have robbed the people of, bring over here." The Seikh complied and brought forth all the things. At the Guru's bidding he gave all that out in charity in God's name. He began to say, "Hail Guru! Hail Guru!".....Became a devoted Sikh and established the first true *dharamshala* at his place.

4

His first odyssey was towards the East. Mardana the minstrel was his company during this. His fare was air. His dress? A robe mango-coloured, another white. A shoe on one foot, a wooden sandal on the other. A pall around his neck. The cap of a qalander. A necklace of bones. A saffron mark over his brow!

On the way they met Sheikh Wajid Sayyad riding a palanquin, six men holding it on their shoulders. He alighted therefrom under a tree. Then Mardana asked the Baba, "Don't you think there is one God?" "Yes, Mardana there is but one God", the Baba answered. Mardana then said, "My Lord!; whose creation is he who came riding the palanquin, and who were they who bare-footed came lifting his palanquin and who now are panting for breath?" Then the Baba said:

They were mendicants in their previous birth  
Tolerated the winter's sting;  
On that count in this life  
Have their limbs been decorated.

The Baba further said, "Mardana dear! from penance one obtains sovereignty, from sovereignty, one can go to hell; Everyone born into this world came naked from the mother's womb, and his pleasures and pains are the consequence of the actions of previous life of his."

5

That place he left and went to a village. However, there, none would let him stay in that village. On the contrary, he was made fun of. The Guru then composed and sang the following *shloka* :

How shall I save my honour in the face of the Kaliyuga?

If I speak, they say "He prattles much?"

If I keep quiet, they conclude: he has no sense.

If I sit, they say, he does not budge from his seat;"  
 If I go away, they say, "He has thrown dust into our head."  
 If I kneel they say, "In fear he prays."  
 Now where can I freedom find? How should I spend my time?  
 Here and thereafter let the Lord my saviour be.

Thereafter they went to the next town. There they were served very heartily. They stayed there for the night, and set off early next morning, "This town would become desolate in a week's time." Mardana asked Nanak : "Strange it is with you, Sir; where we were not allowed to even sit for a while, you blessed them by saying "You prosper here." Where you were served so well you said, "You will desolate become." The Guru Baba replied, "O Mardana! if a man from the first town goes elsewhere, he will give them good counsel and save them also." Then Mardana said, "If it may please you, you please save the first town as well."

*Puratan Janam Sakhi*, c. 17th century

*Tr.* by K. Neki

## II

### Janam Sakhi: Guru Nanak Devji

SODHI MEHARBAN

#### 1

When Guru Nanak became 13-14 years old, his father told him: "Nanak, my dear child, the farm-labourers have hoed the field: stand on the border of the field and mind it that the birds destroy not the crops." "Very well Sir" replied Guru Nanak. Father Kalu said, "Go then dear, and mind the field." Guru Nanak went to the field to look after the wheat crop. With the staff of a keeper in hand he began to go around his field. After going round a few times, he went and slept the shade of a tree on one side. At that time Rai Bhoa passed by on horse-back. He asked his men in attendance, "Go and find out who it is who is sleeping when the morning is well past. Go and check." A man went over and found it was Kalu Bedi's son. This he reported to the Rai. The Rai said, "Let him sleep, Don't disturb him and let him sleep." And the Rai went away. In the afternoon he passed by again, and found Nanak still asleep under the same tree. Rai told his men to check if it is the same person or someone else now. They went and found that it was none but Nanak himself. This they reported back to the Rai. He asked, "Is he alive or has he passed away?" They said,

"Breathing he is." Then Rai descended from his steed and got near Nanak. He was wonder-struck. The shade of other trees had shifted away to the opposite direction but this tree's shade still stood where it was and continued to protect Nanak from the sun. He then shared his amazement with his men, saying, "Look at the miracle of God. The shade of this particular tree persists on this child; while that of others has veered away."

2

Then father Kalu was informed that Nanak keeps lying in bed; neither eats nor drinks anything. Then father Kalu went to see him and said, "Nanak, my child, it is not proper to keep lying idle. Get up, take your bath, eat something. Don good clothes and enjoy. Move around and do whatso pleases you. We are farmers with plenty of land. If you could spend a little time on the fields it would be profitable. If you stay home only, it behaves you not. Go to the farm, and see that it is not lost. The trees and the crop will serve you well." Sang Guru Nanak, then, the following hymn in Sorath Raga:

Make your mind the ploughman, your action,  
The cultivator's work,  
Make modesty the water and your body the gild.  
Sow therein devotion  
Make content the levelling-plank.  
Maintain, then...the garb of humility,  
The crop shall sprout through love and devotion,  
And the house shall get blessed.  
Baba! *maya* will not with us to the yond go  
This *maya* has lured the world.  
A rare one realized this.

Its transcendent significance is as follows :

Guru Nanak said, "My dad! I have ploughed and raised a crop; then reaped it, threshed it, husked it, sifted it and have stocked the grain home. What other farming do you want me to do?" Then Kalu became concerned, and thought, " O God! Nanak talks of the things of the yond, or what!" and said, " O Nanak! This crop that we had tendered you never looked after. "What crop are you talking of which you say you have stocked home?" Then Guru Nanak said, "Father dear! This mind of mine is my ploughman; my actions are my farming; I have watered it with modesty, celibacy and purity. This body of mine is my field. In it I have sown the seed of the Lord's Name. After ploughing and sowing I have used the plank of contentment to level it. With humility have I tended it. So the crop of love and devotion is ripened."



## 3

Guru Nanak had a brother-in-law, Jairam Uppal by name, who lived in Kanpur. He worked in the service of Daulat Khan as a store-keeper. He had good reputation and enjoyed the trust of Daulat Khan. He had heard that Nanak was not doing any work at home. He grieved on that count. He thought, maybe staying at home does not interest Nanak. He therefore sent a letter to his father-in-law *Kalu* saying, "I have heard that Nanak has become disattached with the world. Pray, send him over to me here. I hope, he will feel well with me." Jairam addressed yet another letter of similar request to *Nanak* saying, "We long very much to see you. Please do pay us a visit. For God's sake do visit us." Father *Kalu* felt happy about it.

## 4

Then Guru Nanak distributed away all he had and rid himself of all his belongings. He then went and sat in the company of *faqirs*. Daulat Khan came to be informed that Nanak had deserted his belongings and resorted to the mendicants. All the people were amazed about Nanak having given away all his wares, put on just a loin-cloth and joined the *faqirs*. Then God's entire world began to exclaim "Nanak used to be a wise man now turned crazy!" Some would say that he has been struck by the awe of God, has become unselfconscious—a madcap! Others would say, that something in the river has bedevilled him. Still others would say, he has lost his balance, yet others that he has been seized by a ghost, that he garbles out prattle having lost his faith.

Everyone said whatever came to his mind. Guru Nanak heard all that and rejoiced at the slander being heaped on him. Then the Guru in Maru Raga, recited the following hymn :

By some am I branded a ghost, by some a goblin.  
Some call me mad! but Nanak is just a humble man.  
Nanak is mad after the Divine King; after him turned crazy,  
Other than the Lord, I reckon none!

## 5

From that town in the East, Guru Nanak set out towards the South. He came across a king in the wilderness who said to his man, "Let us enquire of him what kind of *faqir* this mendicant is." They all went over to the Guru and made obeisance. The Guru welcomed them, and they sat around him. The Guru then addressed that king and said, "O Raja! You may ask

whatever is in your mind." The king said, "Is there a method by which one can escape death that ravages all?" Then the Guru, in Gauri Raga, sang the following hymn:

In the very beginning, did Brahma enter the house of Death.  
On the tendril of the lotus of Being he found not the base.  
Disregarding the Divine Order, in illusion he was lost.  
Whatever is created, by Death must be destroyed.  
We, who contemplate the Master's Word, are saved by the Lord.

6

Then the Guru left that town, walked a long distance through lands deserted, and arrived in a sandy desert where there was no habitation except some with great distances apart. The desolate paths that connected them were infested with murderers and waylayers. If per chance one escaped them, one would succumb to thirst. But the Guru is above all hunger and all thirst. He approached a settlement in that desert after walking a very long distance through the whole length of which no water was available. Accompanied by Mardana, he entered the settlement from the desolate side. People asked him, "Sir, which way have you come?"

"That desolate way", the Guru replied. "That way!," They said, "That way one is afraid of horsemen; should one escape them, one is devoured by thirst. How did you come this way?" The Guru said, "I have been brought by Him whom alone I fear." It surprised the people to hear that he has been brought by one whom he fears.

A chieftain of that settlement, who was also a learned man, along with a train of twenty men also arrived on the scene. After obeisance and salutation he also sat down there. He also joined the conversation about the Guru's travels. "Where from have you come, Sir? Through which lands have you travelled? How do you happen to be here?" The Guru said : "Listen, O Chief, I came from the Apu land, have watered the ways I came through and came finally through that way." Then the Guru named the difficult way through which he had travelled. Then they all exclaimed "Bravo Sir! How, in fear, did you come that way? There was a great danger of waylaying and besides that of dying of thirst. No man has ventured hither that way. By what special power have you come?" The Guru said, "My dears, I have come exactly by that power whom alone I fear."

## III

## Bhai Mani Singh Janam Sakhi

MANI SINGH

1

The worldly kings, they gather false wealth and then depart leaving all that. But the *satguru*, who is the True King owns the real wealth of God's *Nam* (Name) and Divine Knowledge. Those who serve him, them he blesses with the wealth of *Nam* and frees them from the throes of birth-death-rebirth. That is how the *satguru* is the True King. His sovereignty is over one and all, while the worldly kings rule only over their own countries. The worldly kings, moreover, dole out wealth to their people, on some count; even when they feel inclined to open the counter of generosity they dole out only false wealth through it. On the other hand, the Guru's counter is the holy assembly and whoso comes to it receives the benediction of the Lord's *Nam* and is freed from the woes of transmigration.

The *amrit* that the gods partake of, they can do so till the lasting of Brahman. Moreover, their evil intents and deeds and mutual jealousies do not disappear. However, the precept of the *satguru* is the true *amrit* and those who hear it, they recognize their real self, become immortal; moreover, their jealousies and pride, passion and wrath all disappear. That is why the Guru's *amrit* is the true *amrit*.

2

The discipleship of the Guru is a subtle affair. It is like walking over the sword's edges, for it involve giving up of passion and wrath etc. The adverse habits of successive lives disappear on receiving the Guru's benediction. If one engenders pride within, one shall find it difficult to tread on the Sikh path. Just as oil is extracted from the seeds in the oil-press, so all pains are extracted from one's being by the Guru. Just as the beak of the swan, being sour, separates water from milk and the swan partakes of the curdled milk but leaves water behind; so too, the Gurus's sikhs discriminate between truth and untruth, know of the impermanence of the human body and discard deriving pleasures and satisfying appetites. They attend to the Truth of Divine Wisdom and hold it firm; and shedding all desire and self importance, delve into the Guru's word. Word it is like licking tasteless granite. They pick up such pearls of the Divine *Nam*

charity, and personal cleanliness from the ocean of the holy word. They reckon the world as impermanent and ephemeral, abandon all desires and rest their hope in God. They consider the holy evaluation of *Sach Khand* (the Region of Truth) and the holy word as the incarnation of God, and with regularity present themselves before the throne of the Guru.

3

A Sikh, Taru Popat by name, met the first King (Guru). He was ten to twelve years of age then. He stood before the Guru and prayed, "O elevator of the poor! I hear, whoso attends upon the saints, finds peace of mind. I have also taken your refuge." The Guru said, "Brother Taru, you are still very young. You have not yet enjoyed your home even. How have you known about God?" He said, "One day, my mother was trying to light a fire. I noticed, the smaller chips and slivers of wood would catch fire first. and only thereafter the bigger logs did. I began to ponder over it and concluded that I must not wait, but resort to the saints to attain salvation, for death is quite unpredictable." The Guru then said, "Taru you will be *Kul-taru* i.e. the saviour of your tribe. Earn your living through honest labour, share your earnings with others, and with every breath remember the Name of the Lord. Purify your mind and lift it above love and hatred. A king had a crystal temple erected. In one of its walls were idols made of gold studded with jewels. But the opposite wall was only polished smooth, the images began to appear in it also. Likewise, if one purifies one's mind, then all the virtues are reflected in it. So brother Taru, do likewise, earn with honest labour, and practise the presence of God. Any Sikhs that may visit you, serve them; go with them a distance when they depart. Love all and be devoted to them." Thus did Taru attain salvation.

4

Bhagta, Ohri and Japu were *Vanshi Khatris*. They called on the Guru and were extremely pleased to see him. They prayed, "O Lord, those who deserve, they, on account of their education, learning and knowledge, find salvation. But, we who are illiterate, how shall we be salvaged?" The Guru said, "If you desist from the deeds of the *manmukh* (the egoist) and serve the fellow Sikhs, you will attain salvation too." They, then, enquired, "What are the deeds of a *manmukh*? Pray, expound for our benefit!" The Guru said, "There are four indicators of a *manmukh*. Firstly, he believes that he possesses all the fine qualities. If he finds someone else endowed

with some fine quality, he gets upset and considers him his adversary. Secondly, he practises unending egoism. If he finds someone less intelligent than himself, he will not instruct him, but make fun of him. It has the egoist belief that none equals him. Thirdly, he delves in slander. Should there be someone better than him and people praise him, he cannot tolerate that. He slanders him saying that he knows fully well. If someone is like him, he becomes jealously proud belittles the other person and reckons him not as his equal. Fourthly, he is stubbornly. If he offers advice and it is not accepted he stubbornly forces it on others. These are the four indices of a *munmukh*. Save yourself from the consider the Sikhs as the extension of your Guru and share with them whatever you earn honestly." Thus did Bhagta, Ohri and Japu Vanshis attain their salvation.

## 5

Mohanand and Bidhichand came to seek refuge with Guru Ramdas and prayed. "O Master, please terminate our cycle of birth-death,-rebirth. For many successive lives have we endured grief. Now we seek your refuge fully aware that you will salvage us." The Guru, thereupon, said, "If you recognize your real self, you will be salvaged from the throes of transmigration." They said, "We know that we are Khatris, begotten by Khatris." Thereupon the Guru said, " You have been designated Khatris by your parents, this is an eponym affixed to your bodies. You, however, are not your bodies. The bodies will be left by here alone. You are suffering the fruits of the deeds of your previous embodiment. The deeds you do now, you will reap their fruit hereafter. Then consider your body as a mere raiment and your real self as the witness who wears the raiment. If you do so, you will attain salvation."

## 6

Bala and Krishna were learned Jhigrat Pandits who would entertain all assemblies. They came to the fifth guru and said, " We are learned in the six schools of philosophy and the eighteen Puranas and can expound them, as well as entertain people. Yet, we have not found peace of mind." The Guru, thereupon, said, "Just as you preach to others, were you likewise to preach to your own mind as well, you will surely attain salvation and peace of mind."

## Thirty-Five Poems

### BULLAH SHAH

BULLAH OR BULLEH SHAH. (Bulle Şā, 1680-1759) was born in Tehsil Kasur, Lahore District. He was one of the greatest Sufi poets in Punjabi. He was a disciple of Inayat Shah, especially in the first period of his career. Later he absorbed elements from the Vedantic and Vaishnav traditions. During the last phase of his life he was a mystic of the highest order, transcending all mundane divisions.

Thirty-five of his *Kafis* are given below. They reveal not only his intense mysticism, but also his criticism of cotemporary society.

#### 1

Gone is my love from the neighbourhood;  
 God! what do I do now?  
 He has made a move; he won't stay back  
 His wayfarers are all packed.  
 God! what do I do now?

My heart is afire,  
 In separation it rages.  
 God! what do I do now?  
 Says Bullah, without my love  
 I am neither on this bank nor on that.  
 God! what do I do now?

#### 2

I've learnt a secret,  
 A secret I've learnt.

From A to Z it is the same;  
 Why create a fuss for nothing?  
 I've learnt a secret.

To win over Sassi,  
 He has come in the guise of Punnu.  
 A secret I've learnt.

Bullah's love cares not for caste,  
 Wedded I'm to Inayat Shah.  
 A secret I've learnt.

## 3

It's all contained in One.

Understand the One and forget the rest.  
Shake off your ways of a non-believer,  
Leading to the grave, hell and torture.

Rid your mind of (vain) dreams.  
This is how the argument spells.  
It's all contained in One.

What use is it bowing one's head?  
It avails not, prostrating.  
Reading Kalma' you make them laugh  
Absorbing not a word of it.  
The truth must come out,  
It's all contained in One.

Some retire to the wilderness,  
And others restrict their meal to a grain.  
Misled, they waste themselves for nothing  
And come back home half-dead  
Emaciated in ascetic postures.  
It's all contained in One.

Seek your master, say your prayers and surrender to God,  
It will lead you to a mystic abandon.  
Says Bullah, the truth must come out.  
It's all contained in One.

## 4

Strange are the times!  
Crows swoop on hawks.  
Sparrows hunt eagles.  
Strange are the times!

The horses from Iraq are lashed  
While the donkeys are caparisoned.  
Strange are the times!

Those who wear long hair are kings  
And the erstwhile kings are beggars.  
Strange are the times!

Says Bullah, it's all ordained from above.  
Strange indeed are the times!

## 5

Come , love, and witness my plight.  
I am in the grip of agony.  
In the dead night of separation  
I've no news of you.  
I am lost in a thick jungle  
Overawed by lumpens.  
The Mullahs and Qazis show me the way,  
Leading to the maze of superstitions.  
They are the thugs of the world,  
Creating net-works all around  
With religious and social taboos.  
They have tied my feet tight.  
Love cares not for caste or creed,  
It is the enemy of religious sanctions.  
Bullah Shah has met his master;  
His heart is at peace.

## 6

Enough is enough,  
Talk to me with a smile.  
You live in my heart  
Why must you run away from me?  
Enough is enough, talk to me with a smile.

Here you charm me with your magic,  
There you try and escape me.  
Enough is enough, talk to me with a smile.

You killed the one who was already dead.  
Tossed like a ball with your baton.  
Enough is enough, talk to me with a smile.



You would choke my words in my throat;  
Your arrow has hit the target.  
Enough is enough, talk to me with a smile.

Trying to hide, I've caught you,  
Tied you with the lock of my hair.  
You are still trying to flee,  
I'll not allow it this time.  
Enough is enough, talk to me with a smile.

Says Bullah, I am your slave, my master,  
I long to have a glimpse of you.  
I plead with you time and again  
Make my heart your abode for ever.  
Enough is enough, talk to me with a smile.

## 7

Says Bullah, I know not who I am.  
I am neither a believer going to a mosque,  
Nor am I given to non-believers, ways.  
I am neither clean nor unclean.  
Neither a Moses nor a Pharaoh.  
I know not who I am.

Neither among the sinners nor the saints  
I am neither happy nor unhappy.  
I belong neither to water nor to earth.  
I am neither fire nor air.  
I know not who I am.

Neither I know the secret of religion  
Nor am I born of Adam and Eve.  
I have given myself no name.  
I know not who I am.

I belong neither to those who squat,  
Nor to those who are given to wandering.  
I know not who I am.

I was in the beginning, I would be there in the end.  
Who could be wiser than me?  
None else is primed of this secret.  
(Though) I know not who I am.

8

Your love has made me dance all over.

Falling in love with you  
Was sipping a cup of poison,  
Come, my healer, I am gone.  
Your love has made me dance all over.

The sun has set, only its flush is left.  
I am sacrifice unto you, come back just once again.  
My fault, I didn't accompany you.  
Your love has made me dance all over.

Mother! don't you dissuade me from the path of love,  
Who can stop the boats on the move?  
Foolish of me to have accompanied the boatmen.  
Your love has made me dance all over.

A peacock calls in the grove of passion.  
It is Kibla and Kaaba where lives my love.  
He stabbed me and then never asked about it.  
Your love has made me dance all over.

Bullah sits on the threshold of Shah Inayat  
Who has dressed me in green and red.  
The moment I took the flight, he met me there.  
Your love has made me dance all over.

9

You may not take my notice  
But do come to me.

I am sacrifice unto you.  
Do come to me.

There is none the like of you,  
I have looked around in fields and forests,  
The entire world have I searched.  
Do come to me.

You are a cowherd for others,  
Known as Ranjha by them;  
You are my faith, my truth.  
Do come to me.

Leaving parents, I am tied with you.  
 O Shah Inayat, my beloved guru!  
 Keep the promises made.  
 Do come to me.

## 10

No more do I relish din.

To myself I wish to keep.  
 No more do I relish din.

Another blossom at my place ,  
 Another orchard, another grace.  
 I don't need anything more.  
 No more do I relish din.

Bullah is in love with him,  
 Inayat Shah with gifts galore.  
 That alone is my deal and promise,  
 Living in tune at my master's door.  
 No more do I relish din.

## 11

Disclose your identity.  
 Wherefrom have you come and where do you go?

The status you are proud of is not going to follow you.  
 You are cruel and torture people,  
 It's your wont to exploit others.  
 You may throw your weight about,  
 In the end you must leave.  
 Let's go and live the valley of silence.  
 It is said to be a charming place.  
 The god of death cruises loads of us every hour.  
 Bullah is the worst sinner of them all.  
 Disclose your identity:  
 Wherefrom have you come and where do you go?

## 12

He who has found the love supreme,  
 He sings and dances out of tune.

He who has worn the garb of love,  
He is blessed from the top above.

The moment he drinks from the cup of love,  
He asks no questions, receives no answers.

He who has the lover in his heart.  
He longs for him day and night.

He cares not for music or measure,  
He plays with them just for pleasure.

Bullah has arrived in his master's town,  
All the false notes are drowned.

He talks of truth to those who are truthful,  
He who has attained the bliss of the beautiful.

He who has found the love supreme,  
He sings and dances out of tune.

*13*

The pilgrims go to Mecca,  
My Mecca is Ranjha, my lover.  
I am crazy indeed!

I am betrothed to Ranjha,  
My father is severely distraught.  
I am crazy indeed!

The pilgrims go to Mecca,  
I have many a Mecca in my home.  
I am crazy indeed!

Here live pilgrims and priests  
Along with lumpens and thieves.  
I am crazy indeed!

The pilgrims go to Mecca,  
My Kaaba is Takht Hazara<sup>1</sup>  
I am crazy indeed!

---

1. The town to which Ranjha belonged.

Mecca is there where lives my love,  
 I've referred the four books from above.  
 I am crazy indeed!

## 14

Ranjha has come in the garb of a recluse;  
 What a disguise he has adopted!

His beautiful eyes are like hawks looking around,  
 Seeing him relieves pain; his eyes are a cure.  
 Ranjha has come in the garb of a recluse.

The recluse is known by rings in his ears and a locket at his neck;  
 He is another Yusuf; a god carved out of a man.  
 Ranjha has come in the garb of a recluse.

Ranjha is a Yogi and I am his spouse,  
 I will serve him like a slave.  
 Ranjha has come in the garb of a recluse.

This is the passion of old age; I remain enamoured,  
 Bullah's love has brought him to this pass.  
 Ranjha has come in the garb of a recluse.

A life-long love has come to be known,  
 How could it remain a secret?  
 Ranjha has come in the garb of a recluse.

He has come all the way from Takht Hazara,  
 Ranjha has come in the garb of a recluse.

## 15

Remembering Ranjha day and night  
 I've become Ranjha myself.  
 Call me Dhido Ranjha.  
 No more I be addressed as Heer.  
 I am in Ranjha and Ranjha is in me,  
 There is no distinction left.  
 I am nowhere; he himself is there,  
 Himself he has empathy for him.

A staff in hand, he has a blanket on his shoulders,  
Says Bullah, what company Sleti<sup>1</sup> has chosen for her,  
Remembering Ranjha day and night  
I've become Ranjha myself.

16

My love has made me forget  
My prayers, fasts and going on pilgrimage.

The moment I heard about him,  
I gave up my daily spinning.  
He has struck an unstruck melody.  
My love has made me forget  
My prayers, fasts and going on pilgrimage.

The instant he came to my abode,  
I ignored all the religious commands.  
My love has made me forget  
My prayers, fasts and going on pilgrimage.

I see him in every face;  
His refulgence is both inside and outside.  
Yet the people are not aware of it.  
My love has made me forget  
My prayers, fasts and going on pilgrimage.

17

Look towards me, my love!

You have stitched the kite yourself  
And you must pull the string.  
Look towards me, my love!

There is a call to prayers in the heavens,  
The Mecca is all astir.  
Look towards me, my love!

The Khedas<sup>1</sup> are taking me away in the palanquin,  
Helpless, I can't say no.  
Look towards me, my love!

1. Another name of Heer.

2. The caste of the person Heer was regularly married to.

If Khedas are so dear to you, mother,  
Give them someone else.  
Look towards me, my love love!

Bullah Shah won't like to die;  
Let someone else do so.  
Look towards me, my love!

## 18

Love is Every Day New and Fresh

The day I learnt the lesson of love  
I was scared of the mosque.  
I looked around and entered a temple  
Where many a drum was beaten.  
Love is everyday new and fresh.

Tired of reading the Vedas and the Quran,  
Kneeling and prostrating, my forehead was rubbed off.  
God is neither in the Hindu shrine nor at Mecca.  
He who has found Him, he is enlightened.  
Love is everyday new and fresh.

Burn the prayer mat, break the water pot,  
Quit the rosary, throw the staff.  
Lovers say at the top of their voice;  
"Leave Kosher<sup>1</sup> meat and eat the dead."  
Love is everyday new and fresh.

Heer and Ranjha have already met;  
In vain, she looks for him in the orchard.  
Ranjha lies in the folds of her arms.  
Lost her senses, she has gained them back.  
Love is everyday new and fresh.

## 19

Enough of Learning, My Friend!

Enough of learning, my friend!  
For it there is never an end.

1. Meat prepared as per Muslim manner of slaughtering the goat etc.



An alphabet would do for you,  
No one knows when life would end.

You've amassed much learning around,  
The Quran and its commentaries profound.  
There is darkness in the lighted ground.  
Without the guide, you remain unsound.

Learning makes you a Sheikh or his lieutenant,  
And you create problems of your own.  
You exploit those who know not what,  
Cheating them with odd promises.

You meditate and you say your prayers.  
You shout at the top of your voice,  
Your cry reaching the high skies.  
It's your avarice which belies.

The day I learnt the lesson of love,  
I plunged into the river of absolute divinity.  
Overwhelmed I was in the whirlpool of gale,  
When Inayat Shah cruised me across.

20

Love, Do Come Back Home Once

Love, do come back home once.  
I am sacrifice unto your travels.

I remained as I was!  
Maybe something hurt my love!  
Maybe I uttered something amiss!  
Love, do come back home once.

Bullah's love must come home one day,  
To put out what is afire in me.  
The agony of it has made me speak out.  
Love, do come home once.

21

What Use Loving the Heartless!



What use loving the heartless!  
 The eyes shower tears.  
 He left me with an arrow stung in my bosom.  
 Has carried my soul, leaving my body vacant.  
 There is no trusting the heartless.  
 They don't have an iota of concern.  
 It's like the sparrows getting killed  
 For the fun of the fools,  
 They see, laugh and clap in joy.  
 What use loving the heartless!

He had promised to come, but hasn't turned up.  
 Seems to have forgotten his word!  
 I was misled taking a fancy to him.  
 What a cheat of a merchant I met!  
 Bullah Shah struck a bargain.  
 It was like drinking a cup of poison.  
 There was no gain or loss.  
 Excepting a sackful of sorrows on my head.  
 What use loving the heartless!

## 22

Hide not behind the veil, my love!  
 I long to have a glimpse of you.

Without my love, I am crazy.  
 People around laugh at me.  
 My love alone can cheer me up,  
 This alone remains my plea.  
 Hide not behind the veil, my love!  
 I long to have a glimpse of you.

Your slave is being sold free.  
 Come, my love, and rescue me.  
 No longer can I live like this.  
 I am the bulbul of your tree.  
 Hide not behind the veil, my love!  
 I long to have a glimpse of you.

## 23

Sack the gongman!  
 My love has come home today.

He strikes the ~~gong~~ <sup>gong</sup> ~~time~~ and again  
 And shortens my night of ~~union~~.  
 If he ~~were~~ to listen to me  
 He must ~~throw~~ away the gong.  
 Sack the gongman!

Here it is the unstruck melody  
 with a master ~~player~~ and scintillating tune.  
 I've forgotten my prayers ~~and~~ <sup>fasts</sup>,  
 The barman offering cups of brew.  
 Sack the gongman!

Seeing him is an enchanting sight,  
 One forgets the aches of life.  
 Let the night spread out long  
 Or raise before the day a wall.  
 Sack the gongman!

I have indulged in magic a lot  
 With necromancers and many a seer.  
 Now that he has come back home,  
 We'll live together a million years.  
 Sack the gongman!

The bed of Bullah's lover is warm;  
 He's saved me from every harm.  
 With much effort my turn has come;  
 No happenstance will part us again.  
 Sack the gongman!

24

Mere the Earth Does Miracles

Dressed in earth, the earthly rider  
 Rides on a horse of earth;  
 The earth makes the earth run  
 And the earth makes an earthly sound.  
 The earth attacks the earth,  
 Charging weapons of earth.  
 He who is more earthly,  
 He must appear bloated.  
 The gardens and orchards are of earth.

Earth is reflected in flower beds.  
 The earth has come to witness  
 The glory of the earth.  
 Bullah! try to understand the riddle,  
 Relieving your head from the load of earth.  
 Mere the earth does miracles.

## 25

I Must Say What Comes to My Lips.

Speaking the truth creates a chaos.  
 Telling a lie saves but little.  
 I am afraid of either of these;  
 Afraid I am but nevertheless  
 I must say what comes to my lips.

Secret of the sage who has known,  
 He has a peep into his own.  
 Lives he in the shrine of peace,  
 Where there are no ups and downs.  
 I must say what comes to my lips.

It is indeed a slippery park,  
 Must take precaution in the dark.  
 Get inside and see yourself,  
 Why this wild search afar?  
 I must say what comes to my lips.

It is a matter of good form,  
 A norm to which we all are wont.  
 It is God in every soul you see;  
 You see Him here, there you don't.  
 I must say what comes to my lips.

(Says Bullah) the master is not far from me.  
 Without him there none could be.  
 But mine is not the eye to see.  
 That explains my suffering and pain.  
 I must say what comes to my lips.

## 26

There is a Thief in the folds of My Arms.

Whom shall I tell?  
 There is a thief in the folds of my arms.  
 He has of late escaped on the sly,  
 There is a stir in the whole world.  
 There is a thief in the folds of my arms.

The Muslims are afraid of fire  
 And the Hindus dread the grave;  
 They die in this anxiety  
 And keep the daggers drawn.  
 There is a thief in the folds of my arms.

Here he is Ramdas and Fateh Mohammad there.  
 This has kept them ever divided;  
 The quarrel suddenly came to an end  
 When someone else emerged on the scene.  
 There is a thief in the folds of my arms.

There was shouting in the refulgent sky,  
 It reached even Lahore; the capital.  
 It was Shah Inayat who stitched the kite,  
 It is he who keeps the string pulling.  
 There is a thief in the folds of my arms.

He who believes, he alone has known,  
 Everyone else is floundering.  
 All the wrangling came to an end  
 When someone else was seen had flown.  
 There is a thief in the folds of my arms.

27

Why must I go to Kaaba ?  
 When my heart longs for Takht Hazara.  
 People pay their homage to Kaaba,  
 I bow before my Dhido Ranjha.  
 Don't you notice my failings, dear!  
 Remember only my devotion, O Ranjha!  
 I know not how to swim, my boss,  
 I come to the one who'll swim me across.  
 There is not one like you,

I have the entire world in view.  
 Bullah Shah's love is strange:  
 Even a sinner here is saved.

Why must I go to Kaaba?

28

Collecting "Kasumbda"<sup>1</sup> I am tired.

Fewer are the thorns of this flower,  
 But, collecting them, my scarf is torn.  
 Callous is the owner of the orchard;  
 Cruel is the Patwari.  
 There are four collectors  
 Who ask for tax quite heavy.  
 Others collected in smaller number,  
 I had my basket teeming.  
 Hardly had I laid my gleanings,  
 There came the merchants beaming.  
 It's an arduous path, a difficult journey,  
 With a heavy load on my head,  
 Those with good deeds all have gone,  
 I am left with my failings drawn.  
 All my life I played in jest,  
 I've lost the game in the ultimate test.  
 I am mean, mannerless and unsightly;  
 Without any talent as I am,  
 He has to take pity on me,  
 I'm not fit for Inayat's company.

Collecting "Kasumbda" I am tired.

29

Get up and snore no more.  
 To us this slumber doesn't behove.

Where on earth is Alexander, the great?  
 Prophets and pirs must share their fate.

---

1. A flower

Their vast belongings they left them here;  
Nothing sustains forever here.

Do take care whatever you sow,  
Lest in the end you rue in woe.

You'll cry like the forlorn fowl,  
Without the wings you sit and scowl.

(Says Bullah) no one helps without the master,  
Neither he nor hereafter.

Take your steps with utmost care,  
Maybe again there is no coming here.

Get up and snore no more,  
To us this slumber doesn't behove.

*30*

*i*

The rest is all but idle talk,  
What counts is the name of Allah, it looks.  
Some confusion is created by the learned,  
And the remaining mess entails in books.

*ii*

Come Bullah, let us go  
Where everyone is blind.  
No one would ask our caste  
And none would our colour mind.

*iii*

He is like a beam of light;  
The world is his case.  
Lo! he has hid himself  
With the veil on his face.

*iv*

Pour not on prayers, forget the fasts,  
Wipe off Kalma from the sight;  
Bullah has found his lover within,  
Others grope in pitch dark night.

*v*

Bullah, you may drink and eat kabab  
But burn yourself in His love.  
You may go and break the house of God  
And deceive the thug of all the thugs.

*vi*

Lumpens live in the Hindu temples,  
And sharks in the Sikh shrines.  
Musclemen live in the Muslim mosques;  
Lovers live away in their clime.

*vii*

In my passion of union with him  
I've lost all count of form;  
I laid my bed in the public park  
And went to sleep in my lover's arms.

*31**i*

A lover of God?  
You will be slandered much.  
They will call you "Kafir."  
You should say: yes, I am.

*ii*

If you have understood it,  
Then why this clamour?  
What difference is there  
Between Ram, Rahim and Maula?

*iii*

The Mulla and the torch-bearer  
Have one thing in common.  
They bring light to the others  
But themselves remain in the dark.

*iv*

The pilgrims go to Kaaba,  
But I go to Takht Hazara.  
My Kaaba is where dwells my love,  
All the four books testify it.

*32*

His sisters and sisters-in-law have come to counsel Bullah:  
"Pay heed to us and give up mixing with the low-caste *Araaee*,<sup>1</sup>  
You are a scion of All, the prophet;  
Why must you shame our fair name?"  
"Those who call me Syed condemned to hell made for them;  
Those who call me *Araaee* have the swings in heaven  
laid for them."

The low-caste and the high-caste  
Are created by God who cares not for family;  
He disregards the beautiful  
And cherishes the not-so-comely.

If you wish to enjoy the glory of the Garden,  
Go and serve the *Araaee*.  
Why bother about Bullah's caste?  
Accept the command that comes from the High.

*33*

*i*

It is the springtime.  
Birds have flocked for feed;  
Some have been eaten by carnivora,  
Some others have traps laid for them,

1. The caste to which Bullah's guru belonged



Yet some hoped to return home,  
They have been poked into kababs.  
Says Bullah, who can help them  
Who are fated to be caught?

*ii*

I know not myself.  
How do I gather tidings of my lover,  
I belong neither to earth, nor fire nor water nor air.  
Says Bullah, I am kneaded in my master,  
The way salt is contained in flour.

*iii*

Lost in the city of love,  
I re-do myself from top to bottom.  
Having shaken off ego and self-centredness,  
None appears alien either in spring or autumn.

*iv*

I welcome those who come  
And I am sacrifice to those who go.  
I am in the grip of tender love.  
I forget not my master for a moment.  
What torture I have undergone!  
I drew lots at times, at others I bade crows.  
Says Bullah, I have gone crazy,  
I remember my love sleeping and awake.

*v*

I dread the half-baked, I dread the half-baked.  
The learned scholars are my mates.  
The half-baked turn me crazy.  
I dread the half-baked, I dread the half-baked.

*vi*

I am sacrifice unto those who indulge in gossip,  
They pocket not a penny if they find,  
But if it is a treasure, they don't mind.

34

I'll sing an enchanting song  
 And win over the estranged lover.  
 As I chant this magic ditty,  
 I'll produce the heat of the Sun,  
 The black clouds serving as kohl in my eyes,  
 The wild winds my eyebrows,  
 With seven seas in my bosom  
 I'll burst like a cloud.  
 Seated on the platform of the Omnipresent  
 I'll play the tune of passion.  
 My lover must come and take me in his arms.  
 And thus I'll prove the female charm.  
 I'll sing an enchanting song  
 And win over the estranged lover.

35

O messenger!

Come back quick with the pleasant tidings, O messenger!

I am broken, I am bent,  
 Tell him how I am pining, O messenger!

My dishevelled lock, with the tying band in my hand!  
 Feel not embarrassed in saying all this, O messenger!

I have a letter dictated to a friend,  
 Read it out to him in confidence, O messenger!

Bullah longs for the return of his lover,  
 Come back quick with the pleasant tidings, O messenger!

O messenger!

*Kafis*, 18th century

Tr. by K.S. Duggal

## The Ode of the Divine Sword

GURU GOBIND SINGH

GURU GOBIND SINGH (1661-1708) was the tenth and the last of the Sikh Gurus. He was a prolific writer. Although he had a hand in designing the structure of the

Holy Granth, he did not include his own writings in it. The long narrative poem *Chandi di Var*, consisting of 55 stanzas in the heroic style, is attributed to him. It tells of the glory of Durga and her destruction of demons like Sumbh and Nisumbh along with their followers.

At first you did create the Sword  
 And then the world entire.  
*Brahma-Vishan-Mahesh* you fashioned,  
 Nature's fullsome pageant sire.  
 Hills and oceans and earth You shaped,  
 And hung the Heavens without a prop.  
 You brought into being all gods and demons.  
 And moulded 'em into an envious lot.  
 Durga, the goddess, too You made  
 In order to pierce the demons' pride.  
 Rama to shoot down decaheaded Ravana  
 From You borrowed invincible might.  
 Krishna too got strength from You  
 To fell Kamsa by tugging his locks.  
 For ages and ages, the saints and sages  
 Meditated on You but fathomed You not!

Saintly Sat-Yug duly passed,  
 Came Treta Age, the semi-suave.  
 Then Kal it danced o'er human heads  
 And Narad beat of the drumlet gave.  
 To pierce the pride of the gods, the Lord  
 Mehkha and Sumbh, the demons made.  
 They vanquished the gods, and all three worlds  
 Annexed they to their own estate,  
 Mehkha, the Demon, a hero became  
 And under a regal canopy sat,  
 Indra was from his kingdom banished  
 Forced to flee towards Kailash.  
 And by the Demon struck with terror,  
 All afright and all aghast,  
 Durga-wards he coursed at last.

Durga was on her way to the river  
 For her usual morning bath.  
 Indra told her of his fate  
 Meeting her midway on her path.  
 He let her know how woeful demons  
 Deprived him of his lawful throne

And the Demon, he sat on it in state  
And spread in the realms his own renown.  
Trumpets of victory the demons play;  
And vanquished, the gods are in disarray.  
Havoc unsought had the demons brought  
Amid the mighty heavenly host.  
And now it seems, none can defy  
Nor challenge this *Mehkha* Demon, nor dare.  
Take us, O Durga under your shelter,  
Save us, gods, with your dauntless care.

As Durga heard what Indra averred  
She laughed a hearty laugh.  
Demon-devouring tiger hers  
She bade be forthwith brought.  
She calmed the gods and quelled their fears  
And fuming full with wrath she rose.  
And readied herself her tiger to ride  
To deal with the demons' swarming horde.  
The demons too advanced enraged,  
Imbued with a spirit to fight.  
Their swords and spears aloft they glared  
Bedimming the sunshine bright.

Then face to face the armies came  
Drums beating, trumpets blowing.  
With rage the demons forward dared  
Their swords and armour showing.  
With courage they waged a fight intense  
And not one turned his back.  
And in the field, like thunderbolt,  
They roared, "Attack! attack!"

The demon-hordes, they forward forged  
While drums would steel their will.  
Their pikes and pennons and flags they waved  
And shouted, "Kill! O Kill!"

Drunk with the deadly music of the drum.  
Proud monsters forward dared.  
And Durga quick engaged them all  
While terror-giving bugles blared.

She strung the warriors' heads on her spear  
As *aamla* fruit on a bough would hang.  
And wounded men rolled left and right.  
As tipsy drunks convulse in pang.  
And some she pulled out from the bush  
As gold is sifted from the sand.  
Her trident clashed with pikes and spears  
And arrows stung like cobra-fang.

The Maid appeared ablaze with rage  
As drum-sticks struck the tautened hyde.  
And fuming foes advanced upon her  
In full force from every side.  
Sharp and shimmering swords they wrought  
With brimful zest they flocked and fought.  
Heroes renowned gave wondrous account  
Nor did they hide, nor ran from the ground.  
Fuming with fury they made full thrust  
And shouted aloud their battle-call.  
But fiery Chandi dealt them Death,  
Those noisy warriors, one and all.  
Tall as towers, though, fell they fast  
As if struck by a thundering blast.

And as drum-beats went more ferocious  
Forces o' both the sides advanced.  
In the skilful hands of the mighty Maid  
Steel-tigress shone and shimmered and danced.  
Then right through Mehkha's pouch it went  
And rent his kindneys, racked his thighs,  
As if a ghostly comet-tail  
With terrific speed had sliced the skies.  
He howled aloud with his evil tongue  
And curses hurled enwrapped in cries.

Hundreds of thousands of drums did beat  
And raging demons would scarce retreat.  
But holding ground, they grunted and roared  
And Durga-wards their arrows soared.  
Then as drums beat, and the armies did meet,  
Fell foe on foe with no retreat.  
And demons, as Durga did, held their ground,

The Maid they did outright surround.  
But on them fell she with a yell.  
And quick despatched them straight to hell.

As warriors rolled, death-music poured,  
And Mehkha like the lightning roared.  
"Fore me did even Indra yield,  
How can this Durga hold the field?"

Beat buffalo drum with a thump and a hum  
With sabre drawn did Durga come.  
With devil-devouring sword she cut  
Through pate and trunk  
And the limb; and it sank  
Through saddle and steed Till Ground did it mead;  
Through pate and trunk till ground did it meet;  
Then slicing the Earth, cut horns of the Bull,  
To land on the turtle's head to rest.  
It slashed the foes (like hacking a haw,  
Or as a carpenter plies his saw),  
Who landed in a slush of mud and gore.  
Her sword shall be awed in the Ages four.  
It mortally smote  
Mehkha, the Demon, who much did gloat.  
Having restored the throne to the gods  
Durga vanished from the scene of war.  
With the Grace of the Lord, she won the day  
And deadly Mehkha did she slay.  
But Sumbh and Nisumbh, the Demon-lords,  
Then set on Indra's city their hearts.

To storm at Indra's city-of-gods  
A firm resolve did the monsters boast.  
With weapon and armour and battle-horse  
They readied forth a mighty host.  
And skyward did a dust-cloud rise  
As Sumbh and Nisumbh rushed forth to fight.

The demons and gods afeild did meet.  
And demons they made the gods retreat.  
Spread their renown in realms three,  
For they made the gods from the field to flee.  
But the vanquished gods once more did go.  
Brought Durga back the fiends to mow.

Of Durga's return as tidings came,  
The arrogant demons assembled again.  
And Lochan Dhoom, their potentate,  
Well-known as bountiful hero great,  
With drum-beat did he evaluate  
That captive shall he Durga take.  
She went aflame when the Devil she heard.  
She stemmed his march with her deadly sword.  
And fast she smote the fiendish drove—  
As a woodcutter's axe does smite a bough  
With blaring trumpet, conch and drum  
Monster-heroes did forward come.  
They onward rushed and surged afield,  
And none would flinch and none would yield.  
But gave with sabres stroke on stroke.

Then Durga did Kalika invoke,  
Who out from her brow did instantly hurl  
As banners in full wind unfurl,  
And plunged in the fray like a bellowing bull.

It looked as Shiva himself in rage  
Had come with a vengeance on the stage;  
Or Vishnu with his Nandag sword  
With bursting rage came racing forth.

But devils, it looked, could hold them all,  
Their every move with skill could stall.  
Their sabres and pikes and arrows hissed  
But Kalika deftly them dismissed.  
She thrust amidst them with speed  
And felled she men and felled she steed.  
And as she pulled some by the hair,  
Others in fright were frozen there.  
A million demons she hurled around,  
Many more panting for breath were found.  
The pick of the brave to hell she sent.  
Thus did Kali her anger vent.  
Stentorian drums the drummers beat.  
Surging forth the forces did meet.  
Chief Nisumbh with a spur on his heel,  
Safe, secured with a net of steel.  
Held in his hand his crow-bar straight

Which from Multan he'd purchased,  
 Came to clash with Kalika great  
 Who, it looked, was in his wait.  
 Pulled out her sabre, she plied it with speed  
 She sliced Nisumbh, his saddle and steed,  
 Severing them all it went to the ground,  
 There rest it found.  
 Fell Nisumbh with an uproar harsh—  
 Making to Sumbh his obeisance last.  
 Bravo O Khan!  
 Your horses prance!  
 Your sinews stretch!  
 Your sabres dance!  
 Bravo O Khan!  
 Your quaffing of a cup,  
 Your chewing of paan!

The devils, again, they challenged the Maid,  
 And both sides fought with thundering zeal.  
 And the goddess with her many hands  
 She did diverse weaponry wield.  
 And slayed she Sumbh,  
 And smashed Nisumbh,  
 And as these heroes breathed their last,  
 The shattered hosts they grieved and wailed  
 Dismayed, discomfited and aghast.  
 They left their armour, sword and steel  
 And helter-skelter rushed as wind.  
 However, they were pursued so close  
 That ne'er they dared to look behind.

Sumbh and Nisumbh were packed to Hell,  
 And Indra was for coronation called.  
 Beneath an awning was he seated;  
 Everywhere his glory sprawled.

And, I, this tale, in verse did bind.  
 Whosoever reads, shall salvation find.



## Heer-Ranjha

WARRIS SHAH

WARRIS SHAH (Vāris Šā, 1735-1784) was born in Jandiala Sherkhan, now in Pakistan as the son of Gul Sher Shah. Losing his parents early in life, he became a disciple of Pir Makhdum. His work *Heer-Ranjha* is a very popular Kissa, in which he retells the love-story first told by Damodar Gulati.

### 1

Praise be to God the great,  
Who on love this life has based;

Who was the first to love and dote  
On Nabi, the prophet of our race.

Love exalts the saint and sage,  
Love endows the man with grace.

Garden-like they smile and bloom,  
Who the creed of love embrace.

### 2

My tale concerns Takht Hazara,  
A town where Ranjha lived and throve,

A place of bold romantic youths,  
Each one a joy to behold;

Flaunting gaudy loin-cloths, wearing rings of gold,  
They strut about in pride, sing, shout and roar.

Hazara presents a heaven on earth;  
Its charms cannot be told.

### 3

Maujoo Chaudhary was a man of note among the village folk,  
Respected as the village-head, by young and old.

He had fathered eight sons, as also daughters two,  
A man blest by fortune with an ample brood.

He enjoyed perfect rapport with the populace,  
Presided over the village bench, settled all debates.

The world over, O Warris, God's writ does run,  
Dhido was his favourite child among his many sons.

4

Loved by father, Dhido was by his brothers reviled,  
In defiance of their father, they treated him with guile.

Slyly they would sting him like a hidden snake,  
Lacerate his heart with taunting sharp and vile.

They would throw him out of doors, if they could but do so,  
Perforce through biting words they showed their spite.

Self-interest, Warris Shah, is what we really prize,  
Who cares for kith and kin, if they hurt our pride.

5

As God would have it, Maujoo left the earthly shore,  
And Ranjha's brothers felt free to hate him all the more.

"To feed fat and hunt the dames, is your sole pursuit,"  
Thus with words of malice they hurt him deep and sore.

Every day they jabbed him with lancets sharp and new,  
And left him deeply wounded with their innuendoes.

He was a target of his brothers, as also of their wives,  
For they wanted one and all to settle old scores.

6

They summoned the village Qazi, and the elders wise,  
Asked them to mark the land, and their shares decide.

They saw to it that Ranjha got the worst bit of land,  
And to gain their selfish ends, they the judges bribed.

Ranjha's rivals danced and laughed, out of cunning glee,  
For they had befooled him acting on the sly.

They made fun of Ranjha and his simple wits,  
Gloated on their success, supremely satisfied.

## 7

Complaining aloud Ranjha said to his sisters-in-law:  
"You, O cruel, have sundered me from my brother's heart.

You have robbed me of my joy, left me deep distraught,  
You have plucked the rose, from off its root and stalk.

Severing me from my brothers who were my dearest kin,  
You have thrust a dagger deep down my heart.

Like body and soul we loved and lived, we the brothers eight,  
You have raised betwixt us a deep, dividing wall.

Sowing the seeds of ill-will out of sheer spite,  
Into a sea of miseries you have plunged us all.

Remember you the time of death when we must depart,  
None can then save us, Warris, none defy the call."

## 8

"If our beauty delights ye not," spoke his sisters-in-law,  
"Go and marry, if you can, the fabulous Heer Sayal.

Go and play your amorous flute, and with its tempting tunes,  
Entice the lusty youthful dame, trap her simple heart.

You are a master tempter, veteran of this art,  
Cast your net on royal Koklan, make her your consort.

If you can't kidnap her in the light of day,  
Steal her in the dead of night, break open the wall.

Let Warris bear witness to your venture bold,  
You must somehow possess this prize, forget about the cost."

## 9

People informed Ranjha's brothers,  
He was all set to leave,

Stung by their taunting wives,  
He was quitting the plough and field.

As he set from the town with a heavy heart,  
His eyes overflowed with tears, overwhelmed with grief.

But his brothers blocked his way out, of kind concern,  
"Leave us not, we pray you." all of them did plead.

## 10

As a body soul-bereft, did the youth depart,  
Ascetic-like did Ranjha leave his home and hearth.

Breaking all links of love with Hazara town,  
He was now determined to go to Jhang Sayal.

Though his famished body kept his spirits low,  
Yet he stuck unwavering to his chosen path.

Tucking his flute under his arm, on and on he marched,  
Thus he left his home land, thus he did depart.

## 11

Heer's beauty lies beyond the compass of our praise,  
Moon-like shines her brow, radiant is her face.

Ruddy clips adorn her hair like the twinkling stars,  
Her rosy tint recalls the rich and purple ale.

Narcissus-like are her eyes, deer-like do they dart,  
Her blooming cheeks reflect the rose's tender grace.

Her eye-brows are arched bows, bearing Lahore's stamp,  
Unparalleled is her beauty, flooding all the place.

Her eyes antimony-aborned, dart and flash at will,  
Like Punjabi armies daring to invade.

On her beauteous face are carved features sharp and cute,  
Like the calligraphic art printed on the page.

Blessed are those who come to gaze at such a lovely face,  
For them a sight glorious, rest assured, awaits.

Let's go and visit, Warris, this Laila-shaming face,  
It's indeed a noble task, a holy pilgrimage.

12

Ruby-red are her lips, scattering diamond sheen,  
Her chin is apple golden, in foreign markets seen.

Soft and straight is her nose, like the sacred Alph,  
Serpentining are her locks, spread across her mein.

Her teeth are pips of pomegranate, or rows of jasmine buds,  
Like a string of pearls, sparkling white and clean.

Her hands are like chinar leaves, so soft so sleek,  
Heron-like is her neck, her fingers like the beans.

Her beauteous countenance looks like a painting of Kashmir,  
She is stately like a cypress, in Elysian valleys seen.

Tempting are her ruby lips, with coloring bark enriched,  
Out to kill and slay, with their flashing gleam.

Soft and delicate are her arms, from kneaded butter rolled,  
Her breasts are rosy marble domes, veined bluish green.

A fairy from the paradise, a beauty non-pareil,  
Outstanding is her figure, towering like a queen.

13

Finding Ranjha boldly perched on her cot one day,  
Heer came brandishing her lash, growing red with rage.

"Bravo, friend," Ranjha said, his heart all athrob,  
Heer responded with a smile, forgetting all her rage.

Rings flashing in his ears, flute under his arm,  
With his locks dishevelled, Ranjha, stood amazed.

Creeping close beside him, in whispers soft she spoke,  
As if the deadly sword was in its sheath replaced.

Thank God, I didn't thrash you hard and harsh,  
Or I would have rued my folly, felt deep dismayed.

Overcome by the charm of that rugged youth,  
Heer pressed him close to heart, held him in embrace.

Such a passionate scene, Warris, rarely comes to sight,  
As they met and mixed, an amorous duel did rage.

14

"The world is but an empty dream," Ranjha told his Heer,  
"All of us are born to die, transient is our lease.

To tend the tired travellers is your task, O Sweet,  
Let your love and care their tiredness relieve.

You shouldn't feel proud of beauty and its vanishing grace,  
But let your lover enjoy the luxury of your feast.

All of us, O drunken-eyed, are bound to leave this shore,  
God is our saviour, God our anchor-sheet.

15

"If beauties of your rare sort deign to love us, Sweet,  
We'll lodge you in our eyes, love you true and deep.

The darts of your loving eyes penetrate our hearts,  
Do with us whatever you like, the way you like, treat.

Tell us where, O darling, we should daily meet,  
Where sit and converse, confabulate at ease.

16

"Do not leave us in the lurch, think before you leap,  
It can prove disastrous, the web of love we weave.

Speak your mind straightaway, do not hide the truth,  
This is the crucial moment, sift the husk from the seed.

Dreadful is the flame of love, it can burn complete,  
The world is but a slave to love, love the lord of all we see.

Be you true to plighted troth, waver not enroute,  
Remember, on the Judgment Day, we again have to meet.

## 17

"Here I pledge my life to you, put it at the stake,  
I can give my heart and soul for my darling's sake.

Life is my sole asset, which I wager in the game,  
You have won, I have lost, you are the master of my fate."

## 18

Ranjha set out in the morn, with the rising ray,  
Remembering God in his heart, all along the way.

As luck would have it, a little way enroute,  
He met five holy men, reflecting divine grace.

"They gave him their blessings, cheered up his heart,  
"May you eat buttered bread, tawny buffaloes graze!"

"Grant me, sirs, a beauteous dame," thus did Ranjha pray,  
"You are the holy men of God, miraculous are your ways."

"Lo, we grant you Heer," they said, "the loveliest dame on earth,  
Think of us when you are by hard times assailed."

## 19

"God has sent his page, O mother, of His own accord,  
It's a mark of good luck, and the grace of God.

The world would be a place of bliss, if every one could get,  
Such a perfect servant, unsought, unasked.

If God is there to help us and our problems solve,  
Why should you in tedious toil get yourself involved?"

This is what the wise men the world over advise,  
Sword, love and women mustn't be unmasked.

Nor should we ever provoke the holy men of God,  
Who, renouncing everything, tread the dusty paths.

Those who undertake to love cannot be deterred,  
Never do they fear, Warris, facing heavy odds.

20

Heer had a brother who was called Sultan,  
"Restrain, Heer," he told his mother, "lest she comes to harm.

If we now find her daring out of doors,  
We'll kill her outright, let the girl be warned.

If she doesn't listen to you, let me have my way,  
I'll straight behead her with my dagger drawn,

She mustn't let him inside, that rustic menial rogue  
Or, I'll quarter him, chop his legs and arms."

If you cannot keep your daughter under firm control,  
I'll set this house on fire, beware, be warned."

When a daughter, Warris Shah, breaks the moral code,  
Let her then be drowned in sea, devoured by the storms.

21

When once you are by love enthralled, there's no escape,  
Over head and ears was Heer in love, let's hymn her praise.

When once the river has risen in spate, none can stem its tide,  
However hard you may try, floods won't abate.

When piercing daggers rain unchecked, lancets sharp are thrust,  
Why shouldn't that spot bleed and bleed, why shouldn't it  
ache and ache?

Unless you sacrifice your life, love remains unripe,  
The game of love and longing is not a child's play.



Beware, beware, O Warris Shah, shun this deadly sport,  
Nothing but regret and ruin doth this game entail.

## 22

"Things have taken a dreadful turn," thus Heer did say,  
"Let's, Ranjha, quit this place before it is too late.

Hurry up, man, like us take a long, unchartered route,  
I am not at all inclined any more to stay.

If to this hostile home I should now return,  
They'll bind me hand and foot, I'll rue my fate.

If my parents marry me off, what shall we then do?  
We shall merely pine and moan, vain regrets will fill our days.

Now that we have made bold to plunge into the fray,  
It doesn't behove us to halt or hesitate."

If in love, Warris Shah, severance is your fate,  
A spate of sorrows uncontrolled your heart invade.

## 23

Furtive love, O Heer, loses half its zest,  
Constant fear nag us, lest someone detects.

People create scandals, both bitter and wild,  
Love has ruined armies, mingled them in dust.

## 24

Those whom the fire of love does burn,  
Of the fire of hell are not scared,

Those who pledge their hearts in love,  
Are not concerned with earthly cares.

Flesh and blood are prey to death,  
Faith alone can do and dare.

To hell will they be all consigned,  
The false at heart, who stick nowhere.

25

"Things have gone out of control," thus did Heer complain,  
"I cannot do a thing, Ranjha, we've lost the game.

My parents, brothers and Qazi have married me perforce,  
Our brief three-day romance lies crushed and maimed.

I'll no longer stay with these contentious folks,  
I must cast aside, I think, these crippling chains.

God willing, if I live, we'll meet again,  
But for the present here ends our game."

The pain of parting, arrow-sharp, has lacerated our heart,  
Separation, O Warris Shah, is mortifying amain.

26

The fire of love that lay smouldering in his heart,  
Was, by the wind that blew, suddenly set ablaze.

Towards the mound of Bal Nath, Ranjha set his face,  
To get his ears pricked was his new craze.

He was sporting long hair, with butter oil agleam,  
But he now decided to get them clean shaved.

Renouncing everything in life, be it good or ill,  
Ranjha chose to seek the blessings of some holy sage.

Discarding the rings of gold that adorned his ears,  
He got his ears pricked with hoops falsely glazed.

He was on the quest for such a godly sage,  
Who could empower him to carry off his maid.

Take it from me, Warris Shah, these lovers crazed,  
Are not afraid to die when with passion swayed.

27

As he reached the jogi's mound, Ranjha bowed and prayed:  
"Accept me, O reverend sir, as your humble slave.

To get your glimpse I have come all along this way,  
Travelling many lands, fearing no travails.

Make me your disciple, bless me with your grace,  
Lo, I bow before you, with deep abiding faith.

You are the viceregent of God, He the king and Lord,  
The source of highest wisdom, the fountain-head of grace.

We cannot find the path of truth without a proper guide,  
As without the base of milk, "kheer" cannot be baked.

28

Commanding the horse of senses, practising self-control,  
This difficult task requires men of mettle bold.

To renounce the worldly ways, to adopt the ascetic creed,  
Is the task reserved for the chosen noble souls.

The trade of love requires suffering shock and blows,  
Men of meagre might cannot hold the fort.

Only those prepared to die can achieve the faith,  
Cowards who are scared of death cannot play this role.

Zcal, compassion, perfect faith, define the ascetic kind,  
Why should we, otherwise, swing the begging bowl?

Blessed are those who are, O Warris, in the tent of love immersed,  
For God himself is the dyer, He dyes your clothes.

29

I cannot, my master, give away my life  
To make false promises will not be right.

I'm a rustic farmer meant to plough the fields,  
To wear glass bangles undermines my pride.

Getting my ears pricked is enough of a shame,  
More of humiliation, I shall not invite.

To yoke hefty oxen is my sole trade,  
I cannot ply a boat against the rushing tides.

30

The reverend master closed his eyes, and supplicated his God,  
He was rather diffident to articulate his thought.

Awe-inspiring is His court, adazzle with the light of truth,  
Where you cannot speak aloud out of holy awe.

I pray to you, O Lord Supreme of this earth and sky,  
Who with your magic might this dome has wrought;

Renouncing every joy in life, Ranjha like a beggar roves,  
Name, shame and sense of honour, he has abandoned all.

Abjuring every vice, eschewing all desires,  
Breaking with his kith and kin, he sit aloof, apart,

Love-distracted he remains, always deep-distraught,  
Smouldering deep within, burning like a moth.

He has become an ascetic leaving home and hearth,  
Like the wandering birds, he lives on the broken orts.

Give us your guidance, direct us, O Lord,  
Heer is his sole demand, he will not budge at all.

"Lo, we grant him Heer," came the voice from high,  
"We have done everything to push his boat across."

If God is there, O Warris, to help us in our need,  
None can oppose us, none can our wishes thwart."

31

The reverend sage opened his eyes and thus did he speak:  
Go, my child, the gracious God your prayer accedes.

The sapling that you planted at His holy feet,  
Has become a tree, ripening is His breeze.

God the great has given you Heer for your bride,  
The pearl and ruby lie strung as in sacred beads.

Hurry up now, vanquish your foes,  
The omen promises precious meed.

32

A strange hermit has arrived outside our doors,  
Thus by her sister-in-law, Heer was one day told.

The beads hanging round his neck make a fine display,  
The rings dangling from his ears are worthy to behold.

As if he has lost a diamond somewhere in the town,  
He is ferreting every house, searching every hole.

Now he sings and now he weeps, as he does his rounds.  
Causing great excitement wherever he goes.

He seems to hail, O Heer, from some royal home,  
He is so handsome, so young, so bold.

Amid the throng of women does he love to rove,  
The secret of his sojourn none seems to know.

His eyes scan the faces of lovely dames and brides,  
Not a single face so far has caught his soul.

He is Ranjha of Hazara, so the people say,  
A disciple of Bal Nath, a hermit of his fold.

It's not mendicancy alone that has brought him here,  
There must be a deeper reason for his ascetic pose.

33

"Help me, God, if it were my Ranjha, indeed,  
He'll sure unsettle me, embolden me to leave.

Severance-singed, here I pine, drained dry by grief,  
The new turn of events will undo me complete.

O, you have lost your lady love, got your ears pricked,  
Nothing did you gain from love except anguish deep.

How you suffer day and night solely for my sake,  
You have merely burnt your tongue with the molten steel.

Dust-splattered is your body, menial is your state,  
Unconcerned with name and fame, you wander ill-at-ease.

Her face hidden behind the veil, Heer profusely weeps,  
Like a water-pitcher spilt, flows her heart in grief.

The trade of love, O Warris Shah, is a losing game,  
Except a crop of miseries, nothing does it yield.

34

Ranjha said, O sweetheart, forget about my state,  
Do they ever have a home— a beggar, lion, or snake?

As the cranes and swallows fly from place to place,  
We have broken all links with our rank or race.

Home is where we sit and breathe, mendicancy is our trade,  
We have no kith or kin, none to love or hate.

He who cares for caste and creed is a being mundane,  
Not deserving to be called a hermit or a sage.

35

Heer spoke to Ranjha in a taunting way,  
Unless there's joy within, who will laugh, I say?

With strangers, saints or madmen, who can be intimate?  
Who will share his thoughts, or his heart betray?

If to gaze on pretty girls is still your heart's craze,  
Why did you renounce your plough in the first place?

If you cannot cure yourself, why make pretexts.  
To exercise the spirits, to control the jinns and fays.

## 36

Heer said, "O Ranjha, it's a false belief,  
None cares to win over a disaffected mate.

I have never found someone who can persuade  
A man who has left his home to re-enter his place.

Let him use our skin for the making of his shoes,  
He who can relieve us from the inward aches.

Tell me, pray, if God the great has ever brought together,  
Friends long-parted by the stroke of fate.

The folks dead and parted seldom re-unite,  
Let them say anything for consolation's sake.

When a crow steals a crane from the falcon's grip,  
The latter cannot help it but cry and curse his fate.

When the crops of a peasant are overwhelmed by fire,  
None quells the fire, none comes to aid.

I'll give him sumptuous food, butter lamps ignite,  
If someone tells me, Warris Shah, there comes my mate!"

## 37

Lifting up her veil, Heer showed her face,  
Denuded of his wits, Ranjha stood amazed.

With one glimpse that fairy face hypnotized the man,  
The dagger sharp of her glance lacerated the slave.

"My parents have forced me into this marriage yoke,  
Sundered from your loving side, I am ash and clay.

I have broken with my parents, renounced kith and kin,  
You are my love and lord, my prop, my stay.

My body is untouched, my honour undefiled,  
God is my witness, I am pure and chaste.

See how this blooming maid, your love, your trust,  
Is by the fire of grief, consumed night and day.

Take us along, Warris Shah, our mind is made,  
Why feel depressed, my love, why feel dismayed?

38

First she bent and touched his feet out of deep regard,  
Then with love and fervour hugged him to her heart.

A new wondrous Sinai, lo, sprang to sight,  
Contrary to convention, the flame fell for the month.

What a fire awakened, the spark became a flame,  
All the world came to know, the news was trumpeted abroad.

39

Ranjha was surprised by a crowd hostile,  
While he lay asleep in the forest wild.

With daggers in their hands, they kicked him on his shins,  
Their steeds rushed and roared, like a surging tide.

His head reclined on Heer's thighs, Ranjha lay in peace,  
A serpent seated on his treasure was wounded on the sly.

Ranjha was made a captive, Heer was dragged aside,  
The mendicant was badly mauled, piteous was the sight.

He was bound hand and foot, his cap thrust aside,  
They peeled off his skin, thrashed him left and right.

The saint of God, Warris Shah, was beaten black and blue,  
There he lay brutally bruised, hopeless was his plight!

40

Then the case started in the Muslim court,  
The Qazi said, "Give your statement, be clear and bold.

"Let's hear your complaint in full detail,  
I'm here to deliver justice, honest, is my role."



"Heer is of noble lineage, hailing from Chak Sayaal,  
We brought her as wedded bride," so the judge was told.

Though we had no dearth of offers, we selected Heer,  
And married Aju Khera's son with this damsel bold.

The marriage was performed with proper pomp and show,  
We spent a lot of money, gave generous doles.

A huge crowd greeted her at our welcome door,  
Hindus as well as the Muslims did this deed behold.

The marriage was sanctified by the mullah old,  
The mullah who is well-versed in the Quranic lore.

Solicitors were also summoned by the worthy priest,  
As is laid down in the traditional code.

We performed this marriage with zest and eclat,  
It's not a secret, the whole world does know.

Now this boy sharp-tongued has kidnapped our Heer,  
As Ravana had captured Sita in days of yore."

41

The deep-tormented Heer raised a heavy sigh,  
"Take pity, O God! on our wretched plight.

Fire in front, snake behind, lion in our path,  
There is no way of escape, no relief in sight.

The fire of separation will burn us day and night.  
It will sure consume away both our precious lives.

My village folks have felled me with a cruel blow,  
Let this village, Warris, be visited with a blight!"

42

Heer's brothers brought her home acting in deceit,  
They also summoned Ranjha and offered him a seat.

They removed his ear-rings, clipped his dangling hair,  
Dressed him in a turban, made him trim and neat.

They seated him on a cot, goodly to behold,  
Served him with rice and milk, rich and sumptuous sweets.

They planned to treat Ranjha like Yaqub's son,  
Who was rolled into the well, tied to his seat.

See, how these sinister folks made a cunning scheme,  
To finish off their daughter, out of rancour deep.

Mysterious are the ways of God, Warris Shah, behold,  
They thought out a new fraud, a new plan to cheat!

43

Sayal family got together, thus did they debate,  
How can we sit at ease, when honour is at stake?

Heer's unbecoming conduct has brought us disgrace,  
Every one taunts us, everyone inveighs.

If we marry our daughter with this rustic boor,  
The whole world will mock us, we'll be debased.

Unkindest is the cut of tongue, cruellest the daughter's disrepute,  
Deadliest are the sins of youth, taunts the bitterest billingsgate.

44

Ranjha raised a piercing cry, like Farhad's wail,  
With this he gave up his ghost, his last breath exhaled.

Both of them departed from these mortal shores,  
And joined the world immortal where falls no hail.

Both of them were steadfast on the path of love,  
Both of them were wedded to deep abiding faith.

In this caravanserai, O Warris, in this resting place,  
Many a man did blow his trumpet, many a voice did fail.

## Sassi Punnoo

## HASHAM

HASHAM SHAH (1753-1823), often referred to as Hasham, belongs to the period of Sikh ascendancy. He is the author of popular qissas like *Sassi Punnoo*, *Shirin Farhad*, and *Sohni Mahival*. Twenty-three verses from his *Sassi Punnoo* are given below :

## 1

Great is the wisdom of the Master of the worlds and skies.  
Millions have with cleverness striven, Him could not cognise.  
Occupied with His creation, keeps He time-concerned.  
Mortal field of the mundane world into flower-bed He turned.

## 2

With His wisdom, interminable forms and facts He shaped.  
A soul, imbued with love benign He in the frame did cage.  
Here, nor hereafter, a soul He an exception made.  
In every soul the fever of love would in its glory rage.

## 3

Alam Jan of the city Bhambhaur was master of its throne.  
Animals, birds, spirits and humans all did Him adore.  
Glory he had Alexander-like, none was great as he.  
Says Hasham no tongue could his lofty merits praise.

## 4

Sassi born on a moonlit night like shining moon did gleam.  
Jewels and rubies, in comparison, lustreless did seem,  
Whoso saw her form sublime did suffer a thunderbolt.  
Says Hasham her form sublime like sun did sprinkle gold.

## 5

Soothsayers their books consulted, dumb they all were struck  
To inform this to the ruler nor could courage pluck  
Averting truth to the king was difficult, so their nerve did fail.  
Destiny came to clash with Sassi, watch who does prevail!

6

A soothsayer he curbed his dread, and what he thought he spoke:  
 "Sassi, the babe, when she grows up shall be a lover great.  
 Senseless rendered by her love, she'd die of a grief-stricken heart.  
 She will verily shame her tribe, and a tale in the world would start."

7

This portentous forecast made the monarch lose his hope.  
 Then his heart became as hard as the executioner's soul.  
 "I shan't let my progeny accursed bring me such a disgrace."  
 And ordered she be forthwith killed the portent to efface.

8

The vizier thought, "What's Sassi's fault, if she is thus destined?  
 Killing an innocent soul will bring destruction to my tribe.  
 No sin would be worse than this one, why kill her at all?"  
 In a box he floated her off, lest him should ruin befall.

9

Man-eaters were the beasts marine, predacious of temperament.  
 Walrus and whale and seal and tortoise, crocodile and water-serpent,  
 Octopus, crab and nettle-fish shoals, they all did swim by.  
 Yet none would kill her as she was in a desert destined to die.

10

Sassi grew up a comely maid than the sun resplendent more;  
 Humble, modest, erudite and coached in various lore.  
 Her foster-parents looked around a spouse for her to find.  
 When Sassi heard their tete-a-tete, in modesty did hide.

11

Her heart ablaze with Punnoo's love, day in day out it flamed,  
 Parting from her love grieved her, her woe could scarce be tamed.  
 Herself the furnace, furnace-woman, herself she'd burn, nor shrink.  
 How can they, Hasham, sleep in peace, the potion of love who drink?

## 12

The town's renown did hit his heart, an urge for it he grew.  
The peace of his heart then did depart and to that town he flew.  
The thought of it him captive held, he other pursuits forgot.  
The storm of amour strong became and drove him to his lot.

## 13

When the two each other beheld, love-struck they both became.  
Then they parting could not brook, this thought their spirit would maim.  
After longing if one gets love, one knows its value then.  
Only the civil know how to love; the uncivil hardly ken.

## 14

Dark-souled, sweet-tongued men surrounded Punnoo in the night.  
Cup after cup him did they serve of Sassi's approaching plight.  
How would camel-grazers know the pangs of the hearts love-lorn?  
Many a home has *love* destroyed, why blame a caravan?

## 15

The prince was dazed, his senses dead, could ask nor answer aught.  
In Sassi's arms did slump his neck, with hango'er numb his thought.  
"To be in love and to sleep in peace" all reckoning does defy.  
Whoso took over the path of love, in a dream even would cry.

## 16

Sassi woke up, oped her eyes, and fast gathered her sight,  
Found herself forsaken by him with whom she'd spent her night.  
Where were the camels, where the drivers; drink and the drinker where?  
She pulled off all embellishments hers, put dust into her hair.

## 17

The day Punnoo deserted Sassi, horrible was that day.  
Even the hell wasn't half as hot as that ill-fated day.  
Blood from the heart wells up to the eyes, love that wise maltreats.  
The way of love is such as kills you groping in the streets.

18

Sassi throwing away her ornaments ran with undone hair.  
Angered on him for whom she did her everything forswear.  
She indeed did search around for Punnoo, tired and torn.  
To outlive separation is hard, it hits worse than a sword.

19

I would not turn back my life though my love may forfeit.  
Until I die I'll keep my hope; from death shan't I retreat.  
May Almighty my wailing hear, from love would not flinch I.  
Or I shall lay down this my life, in desert shall I die!

20

Blazing heat of a mid-day sun on a parching summer noon,  
Scalding winds from the azure blew, and struck the birdies down.  
A river o' fire seemed flooding the desert, the sun in splendour shone:  
She would not retreat her steps, for Punnoo would but moan.

21

Sassi's slender soles did *mehandi* decorate  
If a lover beholds them ever would himself immolate.  
The desert sand was like the sand of a gram-parcher ablaze.  
Sassi won't yet lose her heart, behold her mortal faith.

22

Roaming around, by chance, she spied a dromedary's  
Seemed as if Sassi had found to good fortune a hint.  
Regained she the vision of her eyes, the remedy for her pain,  
Or as if she met someone from Punnoo's rune terrain.

23

She then wailed out hellish cries that even granite'd melt:  
"The camel that took my Punnoo away may be condemned to hell  
Or be pierced by pangs love-lorn, or Sassi-like may burn.  
Hasham, plague may him befall, to dust his seed may turn!"

## Ballad of War

SHAH MOHAMMAD

SHAH MOHAMMAD (1780-1862) is rightly acclaimed as the national poet of the Punjab in the nineteenth century at least. Though he is said to have composed a *kissa*, i.e. a narrative poem of love as well, he is best known for his celebrated composition: *Jangnama Singhan te Frangian*. With the subject-matter drawn from the first Anglo-Sikh War (1845-1846) its past significance lies in the multiple treatment given to the decline of the polity after Maharaja Ranjit Singh's death in 1839. Its present meaning accrues from its treatment of the uncertainty gripping the sovereign identity of the Punjab. Since this uncertainty has extended with the passage of time, this composition acquires future value in the eyes of many.

Structurally this composition comprises two parts. The first part running into fifty octaves (eight-lined stanzas) narrates the War of Succession. Originating from the court it relentlessly takes the whole polity into its ambit. One after the other, the successors meet with death at the hands of legions organised for the purpose. As a result anarchy spreads around and even those courtiers who are not in the line of succession find themselves in mortal danger. The passionate intensity of plunder percolates to the level of the Sikh soldiery. For the young mother of the ruler in his teens, it is an act of survival to manipulate a war between the Sikh soldiery and the English army. She is successful in her design and the second part of the composition, running into as many octaves and five more, is taken up with the description of various battles fought between two contending sides.

The defeat of the Sikhs elicits full empathy from Shah Mohammed who not only declares it a war between the rest of India and the Punjab but also draws a poignant picture of the lamenting mothers, sisters, wives and relatives of the dead.

The narration, description, stylistic devices and formal strategies employed go to prove that Mohammed's impulse drew from his deep alignment with the land, culture, life and ethos of the Punjab. As a result, he seems a national poet of the Punjab not only in retrospect but in prospect as well.

One day at a sitting in Vadala  
 The English became the topic of the talk.  
 Thus opined Heers and Noors, my chums,  
 Whose company I greatly cherished then:  
 "Hindus and Muslims have lived in peace  
 But a great disaster has befallen now."  
 Punjab had never suffered says the poet,  
 A third race's advent on its soil.

Ranjit Singh, supreme warrior, came into the world  
And with his great might subdued the land.  
Multan, Kashmir, Pishawar and Chamba,  
And Jammu and Kangra, all submitted;  
Over the land extending to Ladakh and China  
Coin was struck under his mighty name.  
For fifty long years, says the poet.  
He ruled the land to his heart's content.

What a chaos the murderers created:  
Whoever ascended the throne was killed.  
They asked for rupees twelve as pay  
And *karas* and *kanthas* in reward.  
Some plundered the fort  
And others looted the bazars;  
These romping brethren of *Majha*, says the poet,  
Demand tribute with the toes of their boots.

Life came to be such in the kingdom then,  
And murder became the order of the day.  
The *Singhs* drove the *Sardars* to ruin  
And killed them one by one.  
Discipline became a thing of the past;  
The army became an unbridled steed.  
The sardars had to hide for their lives, says the poet,  
From deadly spirits haunting over their heads.

Much the Rani was disconcerted  
From where to bring headpieces for them?  
Mercilessly her brother was killed,  
The commander of the kingdom's cavalry.  
From where could she claim strength?  
She had no support of the *Farangi*  
She would sacrifice her life, says the poet,  
For him, who would avenge her brother's death.

The *Singhs* then gathered for *Gurmata*  
And resolved to proceed for killing the *Farangi*.  
Once they appeared before their eyes.  
Who were resolved to finish them in no time.  
They had not spared persons like Vir Singh  
And at their hands defeated they can never be.  
After capturing Ludhiana, says the poet.  
They thought of dropping troops in Delhi.



The trumpet sounded and the march was ordered.  
Went ahead the *Singhs*, fearless and valiant;  
Went ahead young and emerging sons of the *Sardars*,  
Like lions coming from their dens,  
Went ahead all from *Majha* and *Doaba*  
Who, many fortfoots, had laid low.  
Cannons were mounted, says the poet,  
Immediately, without further delay.

With trumpets sounding they departed from Lahore,  
All went about with utmost pride;  
They did not stop by either river,  
Right at Ferozepur crossed the Satluj.  
The *Farangis* in front did not stir  
To avoid carnage on both sides.  
To desert is not right, says the poet,  
Warriors do not flee the battlefield.

The shock was felt throughout *Hind*  
In Delhi, Agra, Hansi and Hissar.  
In Bikaner, Lucknow, Ajmer, Jaipur,  
There was helter-skelter beyond Jamuna.  
On the move was the whole kingdom of Punjab,  
There was no end to the forces in action.  
Nothing can hinder them, says the poet,  
The *Singhs* will capture Delhi in no time.

The *Farangis* despatched a letter to the *Khalsa*  
Asking why they were waging the war now.  
They had a pact with the Maharaja of old,  
The *Khalsa* was stirring a sleeping devil  
They would purchase peace at any price.  
Even more if the *Khalsa* so desired.  
They did not want to fight, says the poet.  
The *Khalsa* was on the spree for nothing.

The *Singhs* wrote back to the *Farangis*  
Holding out the challenge to finish them.  
They did not ask for money at all,  
Even if offered in heaps to them.  
The *Panth* that had reduced Jammu  
Was now on the march against them.  
They challenged his cannon, says the poet,  
And asked the *Farangis* to face their might.

"I shall pull out the hair of those  
Who cruelly killed my brother.  
The *Vilayat* will resound with news  
Such a goat's meat will I make of them.  
Many wives will be made to put off  
Their arm-rings, nose-rings, ear-rings, bangles,"  
Heart-rending mourning will ensue, says the poet,  
When the Punjabis are rendered widows in all.

A secret epistle was sent to the *Farangis*  
With wishes enquiring of their withal:  
"I am despatching my forces  
For sustaining outright in the field of battle.  
They must be rebuffed with all your strength,  
I will withhold all supplies to them."  
They should not return here, says the poet.  
From the core of my heart, I wish it so.

"You may occupy my fiefs across the river,  
Provoking them to launch the invasion.  
Only they will fight who are ignorant,  
The *Sardars* will surely evade fighting.  
I have caused a split in the army,  
To force many to initiate a retreat."  
The forces of the *Lat*, says the poet.  
She hoped would unburden of her cares.

The Rani ordered all the forces to march,  
The cavalry to take the lead in front.  
The gates of the City to man,  
The Muslim platoons would stay behind.  
The *Khalsa* with coronets must take the lead,  
The common soldiers are to march in the rear.  
Those with pay of twelve rupees, says the poet  
Will have to taste the fruit of battle.

She summoned the entire Council:  
"I have emptied the treasury."  
The land upto the Jamuna lies unguarded,  
They could plunder to their heart's content,  
They occupy Ferozepur and Ludhiana,  
And the cantonments established there.  
She would reward them all, says the poet,  
Throw bangles and necklets for them to pick.

Lord Hardinge gave orders  
 To maintain the honour of the *Farangis*.  
 The *Singhs* had reduced the hordes to nothing.  
 From Hindustan, the East and the Deccan,  
 Wailing was there in the Isles of Britain,  
 Four thousand *Farangis* were killed in vain.  
 The *Lat* exhorted his men, says the poet,

To taste draughts of the blood of the *Singhs*.

Pahara Singh was enamoured of the *Farangis*.  
 He nurtured enmity with the *Singhs*.  
 Post-haste he ran to contact the lord,  
 And gave him fresh news of the battle;  
 The khalsa had the field like stags,  
 Leaping seven yards each and more.  
 He advised them to return, says the poet,  
 And possess stores, the *Singhs* left in the field.

In stark despair at their defeat,  
 The young and elegant horsemen thought  
 To make their escape in the mid of the night  
 From the alien *Farangis* who haunted them.  
 They had ploughed fields and fed themselves well  
 As peasants, sons and grandsons that they were.  
 Owners of fields and wells; says the poet,  
 They would toil hard as sons of the soil.

They went from home to finish the *Farangis* off,  
 But returned deprived of all cannon;  
 They provoked furies to chase them  
 And invited their whole ruin.  
 The people lived so happily in Lahore,  
 They have surrendered its keys to the foes,  
 People taunt the *Singhs*, says the poet,  
 That they have performed an excellent job.

The soldiers returned to their homes  
 Some for a night, others may be for two.  
 Then summons came from the *Sardars*,  
 To return to the front if they were *Singhs*,  
 That they had nowhere to hide their heads  
 Was the bare fact of their living now.

Lists were opened again, says the poet,  
Canopies and tents were put up for the purpose.

The *Sardars* her *Gurmata* again,  
To plan and act more wisely now.  
They were harangued all round by ruffians,  
They had to regain their honour as *Singhs*.  
Punjab's secret, reserved so far,  
Had been exposed to nakedness in all,  
Do or die they must, says the poet,  
Defeat is fatal for them now.

Enemy platoons advanced under cover of cannon,  
But the *Singhs* blunted all their assaults,  
Mewa Singh and Maghe Khan stood redoubtable,  
And broke three attacks of the *Farangis*.  
All glory to Sham Singh Sardar of Atari,  
He slaughtered so many before he died,  
The Singh, squeezed them, says the poet,  
Like lemons for a draught, indeed.

It was a war between Hind and Punjab.  
Both the armies were of great might and pride.  
Were the *Sarkar* alive today,  
To value the valour of the *Khalsa*!  
Horses and men fell under bursts of fire,  
And elephants collapsed along with the *haudas*,  
Without the supreme *Sarkar*, says the poet,  
The Sikhs lost a winning battle in the end.

Full many a mother's sons died there  
In hand-to-hand battle of the sword.  
The sisters, who did not see their brothers again,  
Wandered about wailing bitterly in vain;  
And wives who had lost their husbands  
Mourned with dishevelled hair.  
Many *Sardars* too were killed, says the poet,  
And deep distress spread in the kingdom.

Things may improve, God is merciful,  
But the cause of the *Singhs* is blocked now.  
Unity subsists between Hindus and Muslims  
But none is bothered with the *Farangis*.  
Best it is to keep one's pride intact  
And not to fawn or wail about things.

The son of a grabbing trader, says the poet,  
Has now been reduced to a mere agent.

What happened is related in short:  
Uncertain is the future now.  
There is no certainty of anything.  
Life goes on ever from season to season.  
The young generations talk among themselves  
To have seen the *Farangis'* cantonment.  
None knows anything, says the poet,  
What the Lord deems for the future.

*Jangnama Singhan Te Frangian*, 19th century

Tr. by Tejwant Singh Gill

## Puran Bhagat

KADIR YAR

KADIR YAR (1805-?) was born in the village of Machhi Ke, now in Pakistan. His famous works are *Mairaj Nama* (An account of the Prophet's Ascension), *Rozanama* (An account of fasts) and the verse tale *Sohni Mahival*. He has also written on Puran Bhagat and Sardar Hari Singh. A few stanzas from his Kissa of *Puran Bhagat* are given below:

### 1

I am going to tell you the tale of Puran of Sialkot town  
King Salwan's breed.  
As news of his birth reached the king he called the Pandits  
vedas to read.  
The Pandits said, "For Heavens you mustn't for twelve years see this  
child's face."  
And so the King caused to be cast into a cellar his new-born babe.

### 2

Irresistible was the face of Puran, the queen saw it, her passions burst.  
Puran she saw, forgot Salvan; from top to toe was fired with lust.  
Saw in her step-son her paramour, fidelity to her husband she let go.  
Says Kadir Yar, that vilest woman was bent on reversing the rivers flow.

### 3

Loonam, she in her mind argued that destiny's driven her to this spot.  
"I sure'd bask in heavenly bliss if my desire would Puran grant."

Looked, she was trying to reach the skies while pillars of her  
loyalty did not last.  
The savage woman was bent to pound the rock-salt in a pan of brass.

4

Shameless she said, "Why hestiate you? Do not me as mother address.  
Why must you in this forn must greet Me?— From my womb you weren't  
begotten.  
And you, my dear, are just my age, so do not render me thus love-lorn".  
Without any qualms did Loonam claim, "My passion for you has my  
bosom torn!"

5

Then said Puran, "O my mother, on to your bed how can I step?  
I'd rather accept the cross than eye you with vile amorousness."  
He dragged his hem then from her hand; said, "I can't lose my  
righteousness."  
Then said Loonan, "If you say no, till I suck your blood I will not rest."

6

The sorry tidings reached queen Ichhran, who had young Puran begot.  
Her bangles she broke and flourishes flung, dust in her scattered hair she  
put.  
Dreading the grief she'd get for her son, she hurried forth to meet the  
king.  
Kadir Yar, she wailed alone, "What rancour did you hold for him?"

7

"Realize O king, lose not your mind", said Ichhran with a loud lament.  
Why axe mangoes and fence an *akk*? When it's too late, you will repent.  
You seem to be pulling out from own plant full root and trunk and  
branch and twig.  
Who will be there to call ye 'Dad!' If you cause Puran to be killed?

8

Queen Sundran's city had great renown  
Puran went there smeared with dust  
The Yogis said: "If Sundran you vanquish  
Hail you full-throated we must.

'Fore you many a Yogi tried  
But couldn't repeat his first ever call.  
You may also try your luck,  
We can't say what may you befall!

9

Had I the need to hanker after aught,  
Why should I my own self have lost?  
Why had I got my hand cut off?  
You entice me? Should I lust,  
Back to my own land must I tread.  
If for nuptial pleasure I longed  
A hundred wives I could easily wed.

10

Do me a favour stay with me  
You humbly I entreat.  
Come with me to the pleasure palace  
Into a peaceful seat.  
I'll cook what you should relish  
serve with delight.  
Should you but agree to stay  
I'll wait on you all life.

11

Face is half one's fortune, if  
a fair one God does grant.  
If a comely countenance sees,  
with smiles would one respond.  
The lovers they perish for beauty's sake  
they go love-lorn for it.  
What more have they got to wish  
who get beauty as gift?

12

Sundram's vigour, it give way,  
she sang melancholy song:  
"Folks I erred, but you beware,  
none must for a yogi long.  
Woodward gone, return they not,  
whose friends the yogis are?"

She stayed put beholding his back,  
the blithe occasion was o'er!

## 13

She from atop her palace wailed,  
"You Puran! pillaged me.  
The park of my passion bloomed in full  
you ravaged its every tree.  
You did not even talk a while,  
left after the spell you cast.  
Leaving me as Sassi was left  
wailing in the desert vast.

## 14

Ichhuran came to meet him too  
on hearing a yogi's come.  
"Who hath thus revived again  
the garden of my son?  
Haply he restores my sight  
and life that did depart.  
I gain a million if this sage  
brings comfort to my heart!

## 15

Loonam was hit as Puran she saw  
as if with ague struck  
Her eyes lost sight, her soul its light  
no vacuum would her suck.  
'Mid the crowd Puran too saw her.  
But his grace was great.  
And marvelled Loonam, whoso came  
to him obeisance made.

From *Puran Bhagat*, 19th century

Tr. by J.S.Neki

## The Var of Nadir Shah

### NAJABAT

NAJABET OR NAJABAT (19th century) is the author of *The Var of Nadir Shah*, a poem describing Nadir Shah's invasion of India in 1738, especially the battle of Karnal.



It stops short of Nadir Shah's occupation of Delhi. It is not a heroic poem, Centering around an idealised hero, but gives an authentic and detailed account of the battle scenes.

The authorship is attributed to Najabet, a Muslim Rajput from the district of Shahpur, now in Pakistan. Not much is known about him, he was either the writer or the recorder of this work.

## 1

In the twelfth century of the Prophet, dynasties they ailed;  
Cruelty, falsehood, deceit, pretence, perjury, they prevailed.  
Fraud pervaded every dealing cunning was rife in trade;  
Judges and thieves together hied hidden sessions in court.  
Kings, they abrogated justice, menials in council met.  
Shepherds rode Arabic horses, barefoot walked the lords.  
With embellished Iraqi saddles stupid donkeys stood.  
Menfolk gave up all direction, women the bridle held,  
Gifts reserved were for the wealthy. Times were so upturned.  
So take us, O Merciful Lord, under Your Protectorate!

## 2

Set out King Chuggatta, and advanced he like Taimur.  
Seven hundred fifty thousand cavalry soldiers, Pathan and Moghul.  
Out of the people of mountainland, none undrafted he left.  
A million shivers the soldiers raised when they their homesteads left.  
The forces free to rampage all, they did whatso they wished.  
Folks were captured, folks were tortured and soldiers simply crushed  
Of the chopped heads a table was forged on which they supper ate.  
Subjugating their foes fourfold, the victors home returned.

## 3

Both the Zoofs and Tooranis their loyalty did desert.  
And set on conflagration the house of Chuggatta King.  
To Nadir Shah, in unison, a solemn plaint was sent :  
"The field of Delhi is empty, the king of the land fragile.  
Naught that he willeth prevaieth, practices Chugtai are rife.  
His subjects suffer in distress bemoaning day and night.  
You hurry hither to conquer Delhi's throne betimes.  
And secure from treasuries as much wealth as you like.

4

Kalh and Narad stood opposed ready for a real clash.  
Kalh, if asked for aught to eat, Narad would turn his back.

Her from aliment and raiment would Narad restrain.  
They who choose to sink in mud, ne'er can clean become.  
Narad would rip whatever Kalh preserved to knit.  
"Women for me are plentiful, for yen no dearth of men",  
He would say, "But our alliance can fate alone undo!"

5

The king talked to his minister, "A quaint woman I know,  
She cometh to present herself routinely everyday.  
Her hair's scattered, teeth are large, and frontage is obscure.  
For her the only hospitality's human flesh and mire.  
Carries no writ, no stamp, no sign she, nor no document,  
Yet, India' state she can narrate by heart and through her tongue.  
She says, "No one's in Ind today who half as equals you.  
Iranians and Tooraniens stand parted through and through.  
And everyday the chieftains there, I swear, wait for you."

6

Then despatched were messages to the foreign land;  
Gather you hordes Durrani and Indus-land-wards throng.  
We should have ourselves presented at Kandhar town.  
We together would conquer Delhi with our mighty sword.  
Plunder we shall the jewellers grand as well as stores royal.  
Snatch we shall the flying flags and loot replete bazars.  
Viols of the privacy of wives and maids shall we turn aside.  
For the shame of turban our shall vengeance betide.  
This campaigning will be equal to Hajj a hundred times.

7

Nadir then ascended the throne and his coins struck  
All the lands paid him tribute and no one would retract.

He then summoned his courtiers early to converge.  
 Pangs of a piercing arrow seemed to sting his verve.  
 Delhi shall I conquer again, slay them trunk and head.  
 My clan should inherit the crown, or I shall death prefer.

## 8.

Talked to Baqi Khan Nadir and said  
 "Read this letter by Indians writ.  
 Us they truly implore in it.  
 And pledge their loyalty by Koran.  
 And say, we mustn't desert our plan."

Mohammed Shah summoned his emirs and with them counsel held.  
 "Who's this low-born person dares speak like a mighty king?  
 Give him a right reprisal so back returns he home.  
 He must be made to haste back to Kandhar by way of Kabul.  
 Let's cause his Mashad and Herat to be ploughed down with a sword.  
 Genocide of Taimur type let's spread in this man's land.  
 Invade the fort of Kandhar and bring its porches to the ground.  
 Its minarets let us bring down and dig foundations up.  
 And with a flaming fire let's singe his comely Balasar.  
 Thus teach this alien a lesson that he shall never forget."

## 10

The Mirza sent for the messenger and bade him read the note.  
 The messenger read the document containing the plea of the folks.  
 He showed him blood-stained garments, and cloths with fire singed.  
 He also then narrated the news of the war entire.  
 "The alien Pathan invaders they came thirsting for blood.  
 From mothers they snatched their children and put them to the sword,  
 But had our legs splintered like those of Ali's goats.  
 May on Mansur Nizamul Mulk, Almighty's wrath descend  
 Who himself lit the torches to show the sneak-thief in.  
 He in this land of Punjab retained his wretched rule.  
 Dressed in golden does he revel flying falcon and hawk.  
 He deserted battle-ground and turned to it his back.  
 We shall not see India vanquish, death we'll bear instead.

11

They came walking long distances and met them in the field.  
 The horde of entire of Nadir Shah in great splendour was seen.  
 Arriving, they lost distinction 'tween alien and agnate.  
 Their swords and maces wielded they with dextrousness ornate.  
 All their men forward proceeded with amazing speed.  
 Cadavers fell as if their strings from Caravans were freed.  
 They tore the canopy strings and tents of the women's wing.  
 The alien emirs and chieftains were all left wondering.

12

Without feet space can't be traversed,  
 Without arms no foe can be curbed.  
 Without riches one can't honour get,  
 No heartache if there's no heart.  
 No knowledge comes without a guru,  
 without wisdom is scant advice.  
 Sans rainfall if a frog does croak,  
*Zoof* is the epithet it obtains.  
 A dame who doth herself adorn  
 Without a man is lecherous deemed.  
 Sayeth Najabat chiefs disciplined  
 In the end conquer the king.

13

With forceful fast propulsion did Chuggatta king advance.  
 With him were ten lakh horsemen and chieftains of the lands.  
 Such dust the stallions wafted, it looked a dust-storm.  
 Who'd say if it was day or night, with sun or moon and stars?  
 As *koels* coo in the orchard green, in the field did neigh the mares.  
 The drums and brass and slogans loud they knit a thunderbolt.  
 The much-embellished elephants with mighty thrust advanced.

14

The hordes confronted each other, the men into action sprang.  
 Cannons on carts proceeded forth, their chains they heavily clang.  
 Gun-powder was victual theirs, they did chew tons of balls.  
 Their mouths they scorching fire heaved as if was oped the hell.

Like the fish out of the waters, fluttered the falling limbs.  
Crackling sounds in the field arose as if in a forest fire.  
It seemed like the day of reckoning, both sides with fear foredoomed!















